Fantastic Novels

RED STAR MAGAZINE

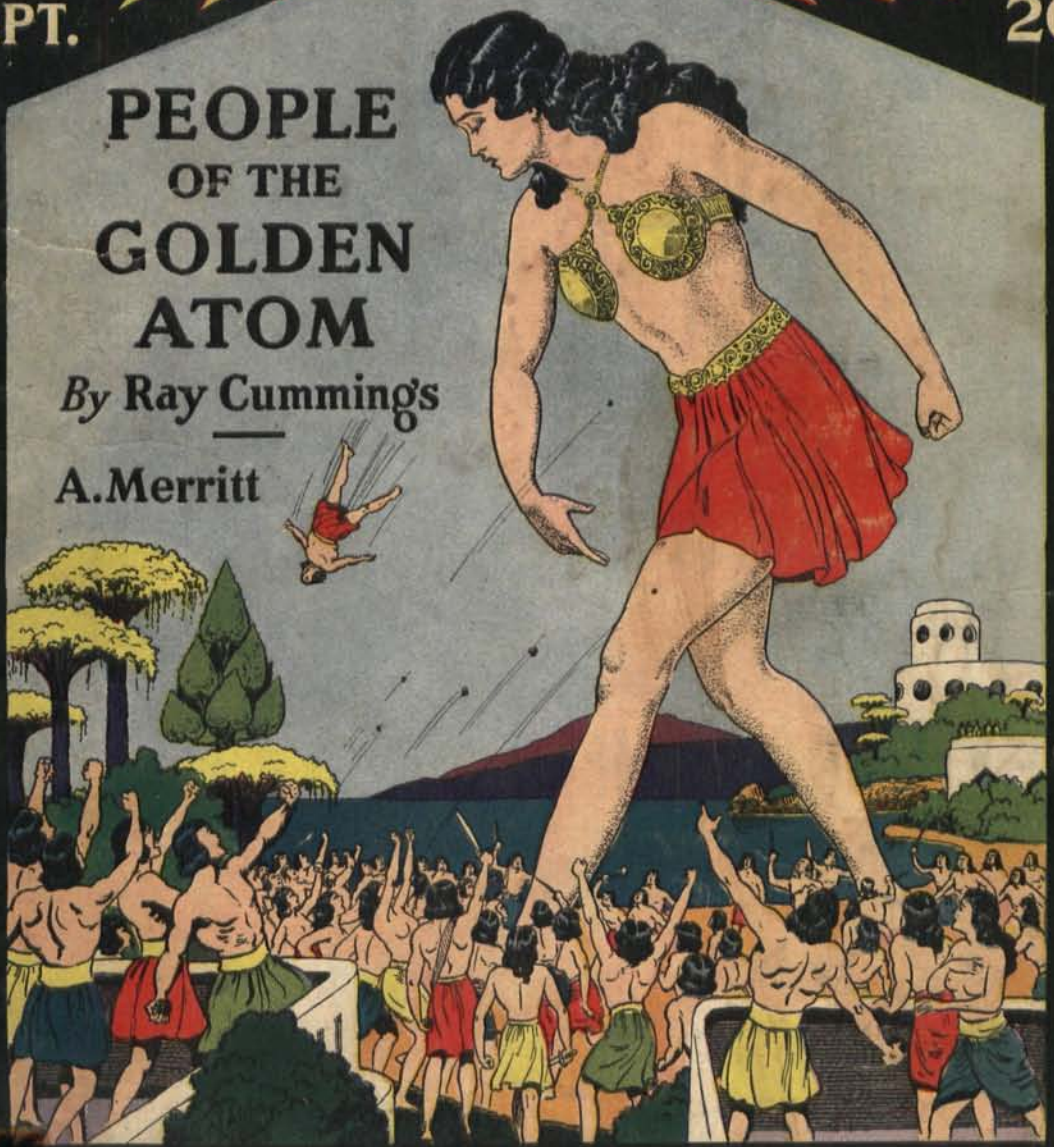
EPT.

20¢

PEOPLE OF THE GOLDEN ATOM

By Ray Cummings

A. Merritt



COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

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"AND TO THINK . . .

I might have lost you!"

"I DON'T KNOW *how I could ever have been such a fool, Betsy . . . such a careless, unthinking idiot . . .*"

"*Don't say that, darling. It was partly my fault, too. I should have told you . . . said something. But it's such an embarrassing subject to talk about—a person's breath! I didn't know how to tell you.*"

"*It'll never happen again, dearest. I've learned my lesson—plenty. Thank heaven Bill saw the way things were going with us. And did he give me the devil about it, too! . . . Told me point-blank what the trouble was, and asked me how I expected any girl to stay in love with a man who constantly offended that way.**"

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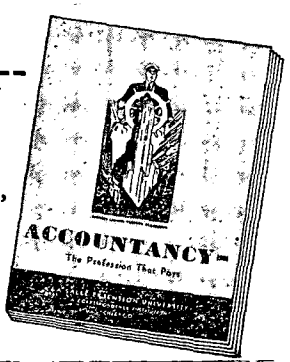

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Complete Book-Length Novel

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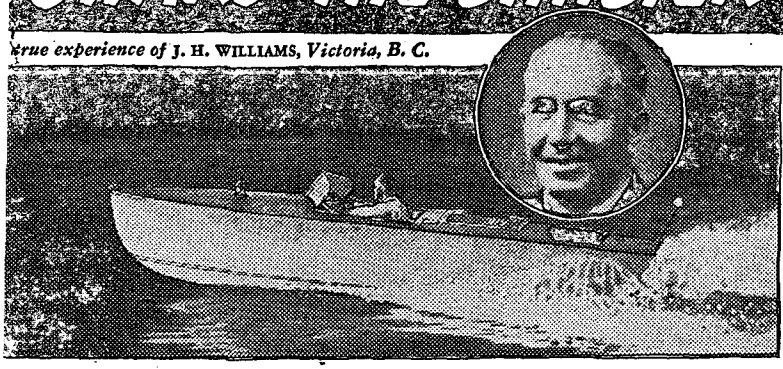
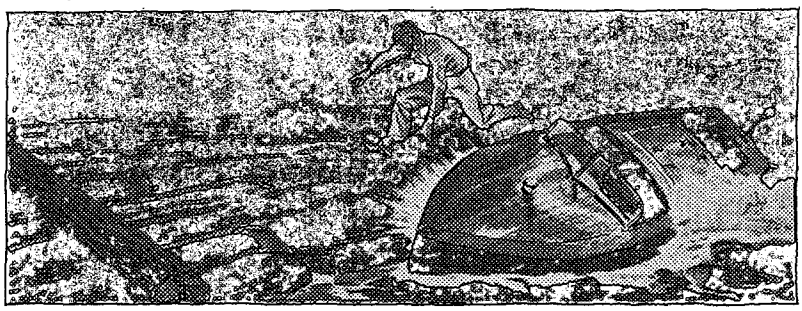
TERROR STRICKEN, I LEAPT TOWARD THE SINISTER SHAPE!

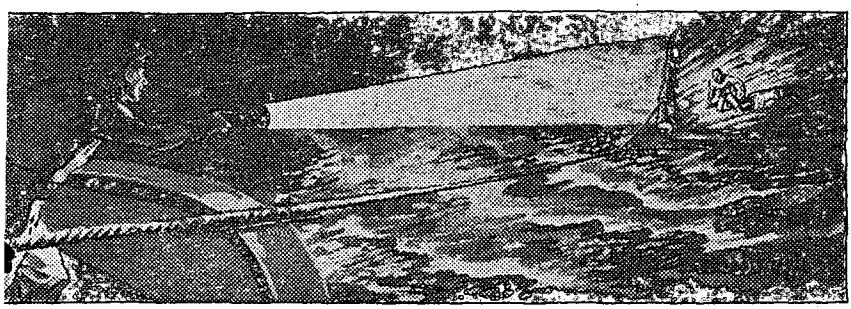
True experience of J. H. WILLIAMS, *Victoria, B. C.*



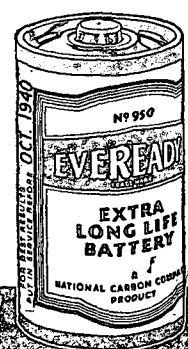
"ONE BLACK NIGHT I was returning to Vancouver, in my 15-foot inboard motorboat," writes Mr. Williams. "Suddenly, a dark and sinister shape loomed up directly ahead. There was no time to avoid it.

I LEAPT as the boat crashed into the object and found myself sitting on a crossbeam of a huge log boom that was being towed by a distant tug. My boat was gone. Shivering with cold, I shouted in vain—the tug was too far away for my voice to reach it.





"AFTER HOURS OF TORTURE, the night became stormy and the tug skipper shortened his line. Again I shouted—and this time a flashlight on the tug picked me out with its powerful beam. To the 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries in *that* flashlight I probably owe my life—and you can take it from me, *I* am an 'Eveready' convert now. (*Signed*) J. H. Williams"



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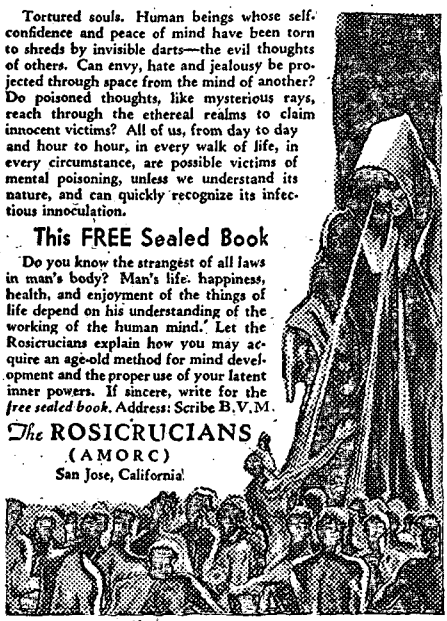

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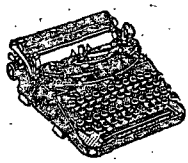

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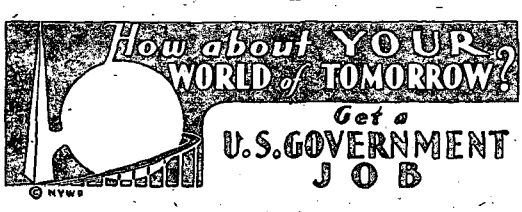

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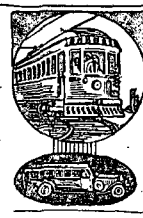

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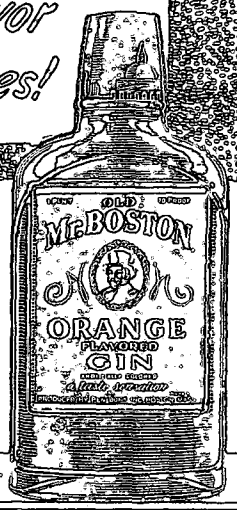

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5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
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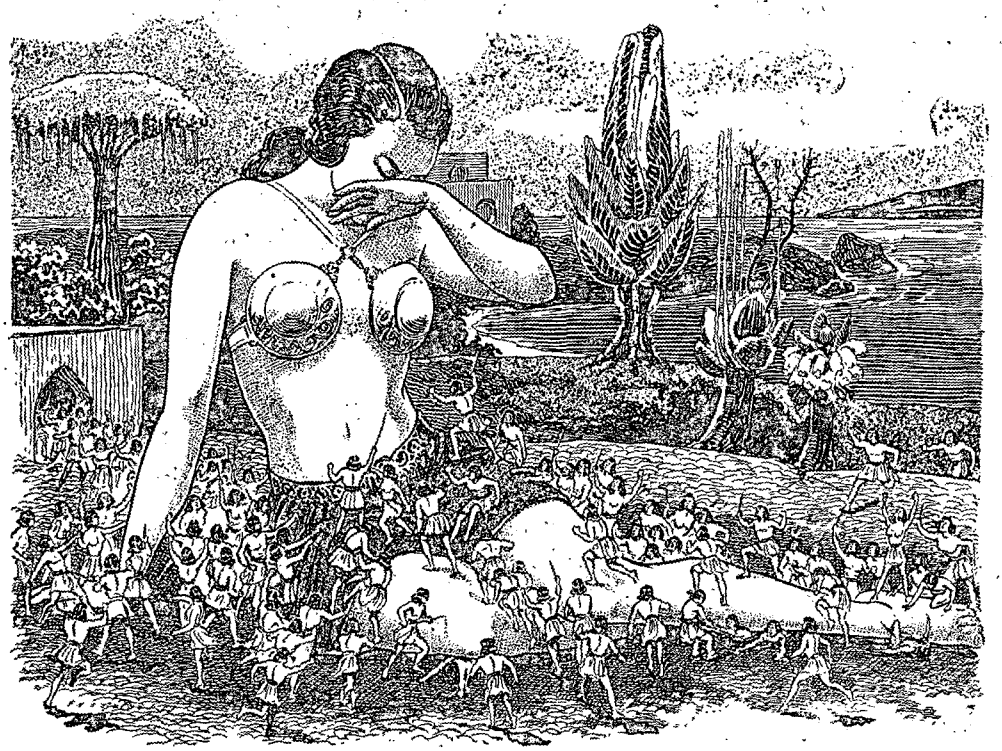
THE PEOPLE OF THE GOLDEN ATOM

It was just about a year ago that Ray Cummings' novelet, "The Girl in the Golden Atom," was published in our companion magazine, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, September-October issue. Since that date almost every mail has brought requests for the sequel. Here it is. A complete story in itself, and a good one as you shall see.

Probably no one who read the first story has forgotten the details of it—it is the kind of story that sticks in the memory—but for the benefit of those who did not read it, we will state here that it deals with the adventures of a chemist, who discovers a microscope of such superpower that he was enabled to separate, visually, the atoms of a gold ring, and see therein the life—as in another world—existing upon one of these atoms. He sees a girl with whom he falls in love, and impelled by this, discovers a chemical that reduces him to the infinitely small size which enables him to enter the atomic world. There he meets and marries the girl; returns presently to the world to settle his affairs, and then goes back into the ring for good.

But he has left his secret with his four friends, the Doctor, the Big Business Man, the Very Young Man, and the Banker, and after five years the first three decide to follow into the ring, leaving the Banker to care for the ring and keep it safe for their return. It is with their adventures—and strange, fascinating adventures they are—that the present story deals.



A strident cry came up from the swarming multitude of tiny figures, as Lylda dropped to the sand. They rushed over her in hundreds, thrusting their weapons into her body

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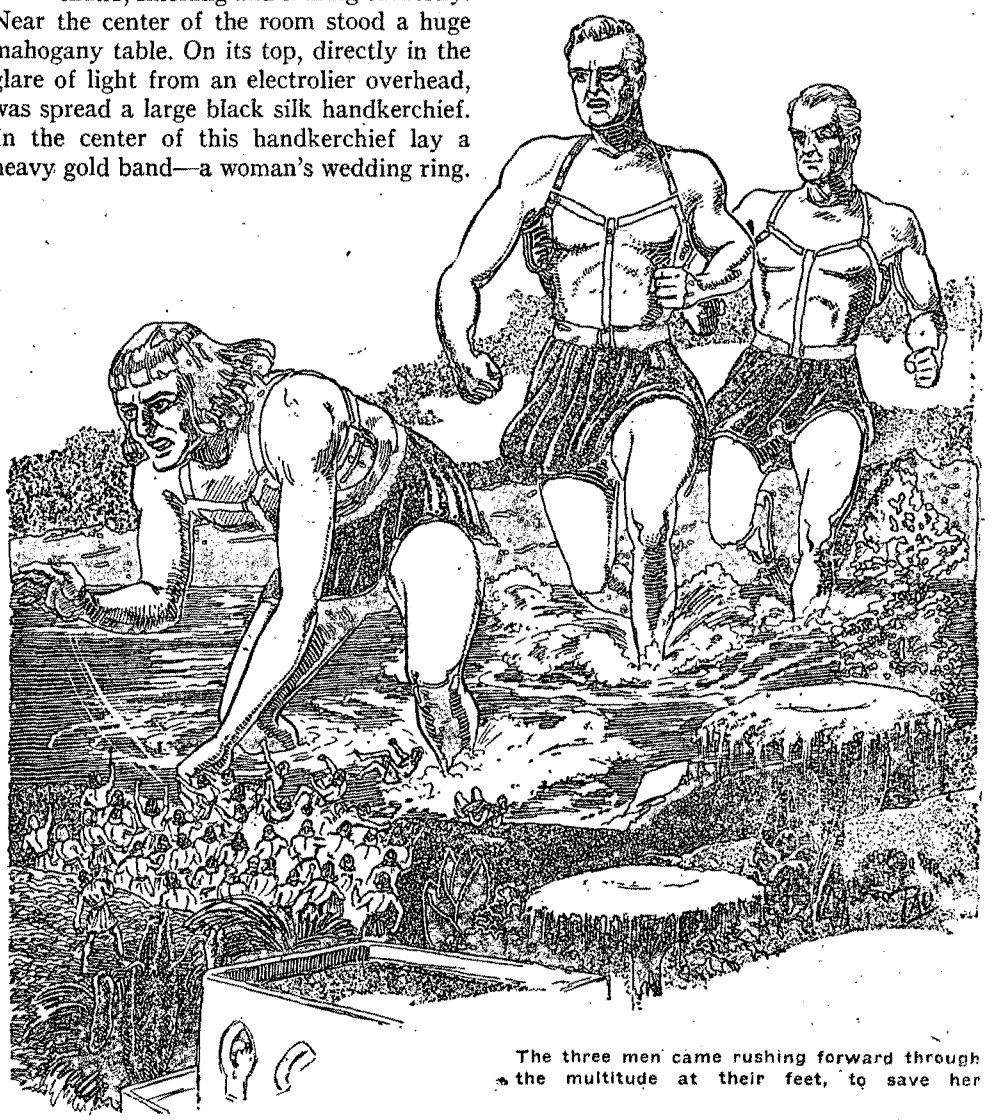
By RAY CUMMINGS

CHAPTER I

AFTER FIVE YEARS

FOUR men sat in the club-room, at their ease in the luxurious leather chairs, smoking and talking earnestly. Near the center of the room stood a huge mahogany table. On its top, directly in the glare of light from an electrolier overhead, was spread a large black silk handkerchief. In the center of this handkerchief lay a heavy gold band—a woman's wedding ring.

An old-fashioned valise stood near a corner of the table. Its sides were perforated with small brass-rimmed holes; near the top on one side was a small square aperture covered with a wire mesh through



The three men came rushing forward through the multitude at their feet, to save her

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which one might look into the interior. Altogether, from the outside, the bag looked like those used for carrying small animals.

As it lay on the table now its top was partly open. The inside was brightly lighted by a small storage battery and electric globe, fastened to the side. Near the bottom of the bag was a tiny wire rack, held suspended about an inch from the bottom by transverse wires to the sides. The inside of the bag was lined with black plush.

On an arm of the Doctor's chair lay two white tin boxes, three or four inches square. In his hand he held an opened envelope and several letter pages.

"A little more than five years ago tonight, my friends," he began slowly, "we sat in this room with that"—he indicated the ring—"under very different circumstances." After a moment, he went on:

"I think I am right when I say that for five years the thought uppermost in our minds has always been that ring and what is going on within one of its atoms."

"You bet," said the Very Young Man.

"For five years now we have had the ring watched," continued the Doctor, "but Rogers has never returned."

"You asked us here tonight because you had something special to tell us," began the Very Young Man, with a questioning look at the valise and the ring.

"Go ahead in your own way, Frank," the Big Business Man put in. "We'll wait if we have to."

The Doctor glanced at the papers in his hand; he had just taken them from the envelope. "You are consumed with curiosity, naturally, to know what I have to say—why I have brought the ring here tonight. Gentlemen, you have had to restrain that curiosity less than five minutes; I have had a far greater curiosity to endure—and restrain—for over five years.

"When Rogers left us on his last journey into the ring, he gave into my keeping, unknown to you, this envelope." The Doctor held it up.

"He made me swear I would keep its existence secret from every living being, until the date marked upon it, at which time, in the event of his not having returned, it was to be opened. Look at it." The Doctor laid the envelope on the table.

"It is inscribed, as you see, 'To be opened by Dr. Frank Adams at 8 P.M. on September 4th, 1923.' For five years, gentlemen, I kept that envelope, knowing nothing of its contents and waiting for the moment when I might, with honor, open it. The struggle has been a hard one. Many times I have almost been able to persuade myself, in justice to our friend's safety—his very life, probably—that it would be best to disregard his instructions. But I did not; I waited until the date set and then, a little more than a month ago, alone in my office, I opened the envelope."

Doctor Adams leaned forward in his chair and shuffled the papers he held in his hand. His three friends sat tense, waiting.

"The envelope contained these papers. Among them is a letter in which I am directed to explain everything to you as soon as I succeed in doing certain other things. Those things I have now accomplished. So I have sent for you. I'll read you the letter first."

No one spoke when the Doctor paused. The Banker drew a long breath. Then he bit the end off a fresh cigar and lit it with a shaking hand. The Doctor shifted his chair closer to the table under the light.

"The letter is dated September 4th, 1918. It begins: 'This will be read at 8 P.M. on September 4th, 1923, by Dr. Frank Adams with no one else present. If the envelope has been opened by him previous to that date I request him to read no further. If it has fallen into other hands than his I can only hope that the reader will immediately destroy it unread.' " The Doctor paused an instant, then went on.

"Gentlemen, we are approaching the most important event of our lives. An extraordinary duty—a tremendous responsibility, rests with us, of all the millions of people on this earth. I ask that you listen most carefully."

His admonition was quite unnecessary, for no one could have been more intent than the three men silently facing him.

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THE Doctor continued reading: " 'From Dr. Frank Adams, I exact the following oath, before he reads further. You, Dr. Adams, will divulge to no one, for a period of thirty days, the formulas set down in these papers; you will follow implicity the directions given you; you will do nothing that is not expressly stated here. Should you be unable to carry out these directions, you will destroy this letter and the formulas, and tell no one of their ever having been in existence. I must have your oath, Dr. Adams, before you proceed further.' "

The Doctor's voice died away, and he laid the papers on the table.

"Gentlemen," he went on, "later on in the letter I am directed to consult with you three, setting before you this whole matter. But before I do so I must exact a similar oath from each of you. I must have your word of honor, gentlemen, that you will not attempt to transgress the instructions given us, and that you will never, by word or action, allow a suggestion of what passes between us here in this room tonight, to reach any other person. Have I your promise?"

Each of his three hearers found voice to agree. The Banker's face was very red, and he mopped his forehead nervously with his handkerchief.

The Doctor picked up the papers. "The letter goes on: 'I am about to venture back into the unknown world of the ring. What will befall me there I cannot foretell. If by September 4th, 1923, I have not returned, or no other mortal has come out of the ring, it is my desire that you and the three gentlemen with you at the time of my departure, use this discovery of mine for the benefit of humanity in your world, or the world in the ring, exactly as I myself would have used it were I there.

" 'Should the European war be in progress at that time, I direct that you four throw your power on the side of the United States for the defeat of the Central Powers. That you will be able to accomplish that defeat I cannot doubt.

" 'If, on September 4th, 1923, the United States is formally at peace with the powers of the world, you are forbidden to use these chemicals for any purpose other than joining me in the world of the ring. If any among you wish to make the venture, which I hope may be the case, I request that you do so.

" 'Among these pages you will find a list of fourteen chemicals to be used by Dr. Adams during the month following September 4, 1923, for the compounding of my powders. Seven of these chemicals (marked A), are employed in the drug used to diminish bodily size. Those seven marked B are for the drug of opposite action.

" 'You will find here a separate description of each chemical. Nine are well known and fairly common. Dr. Adams will be able to purchase each of them separately without difficulty. Three others will have to be especially compounded and I have so stated in the directions for each of them. Dr. Adams can have them prepared by any large chemical manufacturer; I suggest that he have not more than one of them compounded by the same company.

" 'The two remaining chemicals must be prepared by Dr. Adams personally. Their preparation, while intricate, demands no complicated or extensive apparatus. I have tried to explain thoroughly the making of these two chemicals, and I believe no insurmountable obstacle will be met in completing them.

" 'When Dr. Adams has the specified quantities of each of these fourteen chemicals in his possession, he will proceed according to my further directions to compound the two drugs. If he is successful in making these drugs, I direct that he make known to the three other men referred to, the contents of this letter, after first exacting an oath from each that its provision will be carried out.

" 'I think it probable that Dr. Adams will succeed in compounding these two drugs. It also seems probable that at that time the United States no longer will be at war. I make the additional assumption that one or more of you gentlemen will desire to join me in the ring. Therefore, you will find herewith memoranda of my first

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journey into the ring which I have already described to you; I give also the quantities of each drug to be taken at various stages of the trip. These notes will refresh your memory and will assist in your journey.

"'I intend to suggest to Dr. Adams today when I hand him this letter, that in the event of my failure to return within a week, he make some adequate provision for guarding the ring in safety. And I must caution you now, before starting to join me, if you conclude to do so, that you continue this provision, so as to make possible your safe return to your own world.

"'If our country is at war at the time you read this, your duty is plain. I have no fears regarding your course of action. But if not, I do not care to influence unduly your decision about venturing into this unknown other world. The danger into which I personally may have fallen must count for little with you, in a decision to hazard your own lives. I may point out, however, that such a journey successfully accomplished cannot fail to be the greatest contribution to science that has ever been made. Nor can I doubt but that your coming may prove of tremendous benefit to the humanity of this other equally important, though, in our eyes, infinitesimal world.

"'I therefore suggest, gentlemen, that you start your journey into the ring at 8 P.M. on the evening of November 4, 1923. You will do your best to find your way direct to the city of Arite, where, if I am alive, I will be awaiting you.'"

CHAPTER II

TESTING THE DRUGS

THE Doctor laid his papers on the table and looked up into the white faces of the three men facing him. "That's all, gentlemen," he said.

For a moment no one spoke, and on the face of each was plainly written the evidence of an emotion too deep for words. The Doctor sorted out the papers in silence, glanced over them for a moment, and then reached for a large metal ash tray that stood near him on the table. Taking a match from his pocket he calmly lighted a corner of the papers and dropped them burning into the metal bowl. His friends watched him in awed silence; only the Very Young Man found words to protest.

"Say now, wait," he began, "why—"

The Doctor looked at him. "The letter requests me to do that," he said.

"But I say, the formulas—" persisted the Very Young Man, looking wildly at the burning papers.

The Doctor held up one of the white tin boxes lying on the arm of his chair.

"In these tins," he said, "I have vials containing the specified quantity of each drug. It is ample for our purpose. I have done my best to memorize the formulas. But in any event, I was directed to burn them at the time of reading you the letter. I have done so."

The Big Business Man came out of a brown study.

"Just three weeks from tonight," he murmured, "three weeks from tonight. It's too big to realize."

The Doctor put the two boxes on the table, turned his chair back toward the others, and lighted a cigar.

"Gentlemen, let us go over this matter thoroughly," he began. "We have a momentous decision to make. Either we destroy those boxes and their contents, or, three weeks from tonight some or all of us, start our journey into the ring. I have had a month to think this matter over; I have made my decision.

"I know there is much for you to consider, before you can each of you choose your course of action. It is not my desire or intention to influence you one way or the other. But we can, if you wish, discuss the matter here tonight. Or we can wait, if you prefer, until each of you has had time to think it out for himself."

"I'm going," the Very Young Man burst out.

His hands were gripping the arms of his chair tightly; his face was very pale, but his eyes sparkled.

The Doctor turned to him gravely.

"Your life is at stake, my boy," he said.

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"This is not a matter for impulsiveness."

"I'm going whether any one else does or not," persisted the Very Young Man. "You can't stop me, either," he added doggedly. "That letter said—"

The Doctor smiled at the boy's earnestness. Then abruptly he held out his hand.

"There is no use my holding back my own decision. I am going to attempt the trip. And since, as you say, I cannot stop you from going," he added with a twinkle, "that makes two of us."

They shook hands. The Very Young Man lighted a cigarette, and began pacing up and down the room, staring hard at the floor.

"I can remember trying to imagine how I would feel," began the Big Business Man slowly, "if Rogers had asked me to go with him when he first went into the ring. It is not a new idea to me, for I have thought about it many times in the abstract, during the past five years. But now that I am face to face with it in reality, it sort of—" He broke off, and smiled helplessly around at his companions.

The Very Young Man stopped in his walk. "Aw, come on in," he began, "the—"

"Shut up," growled the Banker, speaking for the first time in many minutes.

"I'm sure we would all like to go," said the Doctor. "The point is, which of us are best fitted for the trip."

"None of us are married," put in the Very Young Man.

"I've been thinking—" began the Banker. "Suppose we get into the ring—how long would we be gone, do you suppose?"

"Who can say?" answered the Doctor, smiling. "Perhaps a month—a year—many years possibly. That is one of the hazards of the venture."

The Banker went on thoughtfully. "Do you remember that argument we had with Rogers about time? Time goes twice as fast, didn't he say, in that other world?"

"Two and a half times faster, if I remember rightly, he estimated," replied the Doctor.

The Banker looked at his skinny hands a moment. "I owned up to sixty-four once," he said. "Two years and a half in one year. No, I guess I'll let you young fellows tackle that; I'll stay here in this world where things don't move so fast."

"Somebody's got to stay," said the Very Young Man. "By golly, you know if we're all going into that ring it would be pretty sad to have anything happen to it while we were gone."

"That's so," said the Banker, looking relieved. "I never thought of that."

"One of us should stay at least," said the Doctor. "We cannot take any outsider into our confidence. One of us must watch the others go, and then take the ring back to its place in the Museum. We will be gone too long a time for one person to watch it here."

The Very Young Man suddenly went to one of the doors and locked it.

"We don't want any one coming in," he explained as he crossed the room and locked the others.

"And another thing," he went on, coming back to the table. "When I saw the ring at the Biological Society the other day, I happened to think, suppose Rogers was to come out on the underneath side? It was lying flat, you know, just as it is now." He pointed to where the ring lay on the handkerchief before them. "I meant to speak to you about it," he added.

"I thought of that," said the Doctor. "When I had that case built to bring the ring here, you notice I raised it above the bottom a little, holding it suspended in that wire frame."

"We'd better fix up something like that at the Museum, too," said the Very Young Man, and went back to his walk.

The Big Business Man had been busily jotting down figures on the back of an envelope. "I can be in shape to go in three weeks," he said suddenly.

"Fine!" said the Very Young Man. "Then it's all settled." The Big Business Man went back to his notes.

"I knew what your answer would be," said the Doctor. "My patients can go to the devil. This is too big a thing."

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THE Very Young Man picked up one of the tin boxes. "Tell us how you made the powders," he suggested.

The Doctor took the two boxes and opened them. Inside each were a number of tiny glass vials. Those in one box were of blue glass; those in the other were red.

"These vials," said the Doctor, "contain tiny pellets of the completed drug. That for diminishing size I have put in the red vials; those of blue are the other drug.

"I had rather a difficult time making them—that is compared to what I anticipated. Most of the chemicals I bought without difficulty. But when I came to compound those two myself"—the Doctor smiled—"I used to think I was a fair chemist in my student days. But now—well, at least I got the results, but only because I have been working almost night and day for the past month. And I found myself with a remarkably complete experimental laboratory when I finished," he added. "That was yesterday; I spent nearly all last night destroying the apparatus, as soon as I found that the drugs had been properly made."

"They do work?" said the Very Young Man anxiously.

"They work," answered the Doctor. "I tried them both very carefully."

"On yourself?" said the Big Business Man.

"No, I didn't think that necessary. I used several insects."

"Let's try them now," suggested the Very Young Man eagerly.

"Not the big one," said the Banker. "Once was enough for that."

"All right," the Doctor laughed. "We'll try the other if you like."

The Big Business Man looked around the room. "There are a few flies around here if we can catch one," he suggested.

"I'll bet there's a roach in the kitchen," said the Very Young Man, jumping up.

The Doctor took a brass check from his pocket. "I thought probably you'd want to try them out. Will you get that box from the check-room?" He handed the check to the Very Young Man, who hurried out of the room. He returned in a moment, gingerly carrying a cardboard box with holes perforated in the top. The Doctor took the box and lifted the lid carefully. Inside, the box was partitioned into two compartments. In one compartment were three little alligators about four inches long; in the other were two brown sparrows. The Doctor took out one of the sparrows and replaced the cover.

"Fine," said the Very Young Man with enthusiasm.

The Doctor reached for the boxes of chemicals.

"Not the big one," said the Banker again, apprehensively.

"Hold him, will you?" the Doctor said.

The Very Young Man took the sparrow in his hands.

"Now," continued the Doctor, "what we need is a plate and a little water."

"There's a tray," said the Very Young Man, pointing with his hands holding the sparrow.

The Doctor took a spoon from the tray and put a little water in it. Then he took one of the tiny pellets from a red vial and crushing it in his fingers, sprinkled a few grains into the water.

"Hold that a moment, please." The Big Business Man took the proffered spoon.

Then the Doctor produced from his pocket a magnifying glass and a tiny pair of silver calipers such as are used by jewelers for handling small objects.

"What's the idea?" the Very Young Man wanted to know.

"I thought I'd try and put him on the ring," explained the Doctor. "Now then, hold his beak."

The Very Young Man did so, and the Doctor poured the water down the bird's throat. Most of it spilled; the sparrow twisted its head violently, but evidently some of the liquid had gone down the bird's throat.

Silence followed, broken after a moment by the scared voice of the Very Young Man. "He's getting smaller; I can feel him. He's getting smaller."

"Hold on to him," cautioned the Doctor.

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"Bring him over here." They went over to the table by the ring, the Banker and the Big Business Man standing close beside them.

"Suppose he tried to fly when we let go of him," suggested the Very Young Man almost in a whisper.

"He'll probably be too confused," answered the Doctor. "Have you got him?" The sparrow was hardly bigger than a large horse-fly now, and the Very Young Man was holding it between his thumb and forefinger.

"Better give him to me," said the Doctor. "Set him down."

"He might fly away," remonstrated the Very Young Man.

"No, he won't."

The Very Young Man put the sparrow on the handkerchief beside the ring and the Doctor immediately picked it up with the calipers.

"Don't squeeze him," cautioned the Very Young Man.

The sparrow grew steadily smaller, and in a moment the Doctor set it carefully on the rim of the ring.

"Get him up by the scratch," whispered the Very Young Man.

The men bent closer over the table, as the Doctor, looking through his magnifying glass, shoved the sparrow slowly along the top of the ring.

"I can't see him," said the Banker.

"I can," said the Very Young Man, "right by the scratch." Then after a moment, "He's gone."

"I've got him right over the scratch," said the Doctor, leaning farther down. Then he raised his head and laid the magnifying glass and the calipers on the table. "He's gone now."

"Gosh," said the Very Young Man, drawing a long breath.

The Banker flung himself into a chair as though exhausted from a great physical effort.

"Well, it certainly does work," said the Big Business Man, "there's no question about that."

The Very Young Man was shaking the cardboard box in his hands and lifting its cover cautiously to see inside. "Let's try an alligator," he suggested.

"Oh, what's the use?" the Banker protested wearily. "We know it works."

"Well, it can't hurt anything to try, can it?" the Very Young Man urged. "Besides, the more we try, the more sure we are it will work with us when the time comes. You don't want to try it on yourself, now, do you?" he added with a grin.

"No, thank you," retorted the Banker with emphasis.

"I think we might as well try again," said the Big Business Man.

The Very Young Man took one of the tiny alligators from the box, and in a moment they had dropped some water containing the drug down its throat. "Try to put him on the scratch, too," said the Very Young Man.

When the alligator was small enough the Doctor held it with the calipers and then laid it on the ring.

"Look at him walk; look at him walk," whispered the Very Young Man excitedly. The alligator, hardly more than an eighth of an inch long now, but still plainly visible, was wriggling along the top of the ring. "Shove him up by the scratch," he added.

In a moment more the animal was too small for any but the Doctor, with his glass, to see. "I guess he got there," he said finally with a smile, as he straightened up. "He was going fast."

"Well, *that's* all right," said the Very Young Man with a sigh of relief.

THE four men again seated themselves; the Big Business Man went back to his figures.

"When do you start?" asked the Banker after a moment.

"November 4th—8 P.M.," answered the Doctor. "Three weeks from tonight."

"We've a lot to do," said the Banker.

"What will this cost, do you figure?" asked the Big Business Man, looking up from his notes.

The Doctor considered a moment.

"We can't take much with us, you know,"

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he said slowly. Then he took a sheet of memoranda from his pockets. "I have already spent for apparatus and chemicals to prepare the drugs"—he consulted his figures—"seventeen hundred and forty dollars, total. What we have still to spend will be very little, I should think. I propose we divide it three ways as we have been doing with the Museum."

"Four ways," said the Very Young Man. "I'm no kid any more. I got a good job—that is," he added with a rueful air, "I had a good job. Tomorrow I quit."

"Four ways," the Doctor corrected himself gravely. "I guess we can manage that."

"What can we take with us, do you think?" asked the Big Business Man.

"I think we should try strapping a belt around our waists, with pouches in it," said the Doctor. "I doubt if it would contract with our bodies, but still it might. If it didn't there would be no harm done; we could leave it behind."

"You want food and water," said the Banker. "Remember that barren country you are going through."

"And something on our feet," the Big Business Man put in.

"I'd like to take a revolver, too," said the Very Young Man; "it might come in awful handy."

"As I remember Rogers' description," said the Doctor thoughtfully, "the trip out is more difficult than going down. We mustn't overlook preparations for that; it is most imperative we should be careful."

"Say, talking about getting back," burst out the Very Young Man, "I'd like to see that other drug work first. It would be pretty rotten to get in there and have it go back on us, wouldn't it? Oh, golly!" The Very Young Man sank back in his chair overcome by the very idea.

"I tried it," said the Doctor. "It works."

"I'd like to see it again with something different," said the Big Business Man, "it can't do any harm." The Banker looked his protest, but said nothing.

"What shall we try, an alligator?" suggested the Very Young Man. The Doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"What'll we kill it with? Oh, I know." The Very Young Man picked up a heavy metal paper weight from the desk. "This'll do the trick fine," he added.

Then, laying the paper weight carefully aside, he dipped up a spoonful of water and offered it to the Doctor.

"Not that water this time," said the Doctor, shaking his head with a smile.

The Very Young Man looked blank.

"Organisms in it," the Doctor explained briefly. "All right for them to get small from the other chemical, but we don't want them to get large and come out at us, do we?"

"Holy smoke, I should say not," said the Very Young Man, gasping; and the Banker growled:

"Something's going to happen to us, playing with fire like this."

The Doctor produced a little bottle. "I boiled this water," he said. "We can use this."

It took but a moment to give the other drug to one of the remaining alligators, although they spilled more of the water than went down its throat.

"Don't you forget to hit him, and don't you wait very long," said the Banker warningly, moving nearer the door.

"Oh, I'll hit him all right, don't worry," said the Very Young Man, brandishing the paper weight.

The Doctor knelt down, and held the animal pinned to the floor; the Very Young Man knelt beside him. Slowly the alligator began to increase in size.

"He's growing," said the Banker. "Hit him, boy! What's the use of waiting? He's growing."

The alligator was nearly a foot long now, and struggling violently between the Doctor's fingers.

"You'd better kill him," said the Doctor. "He might get away from me." The Very Young Man obediently brought his weapon down with a thump upon the animal's head.

"Keep on," said the Banker. "Be sure he's dead."

The Very Young Man pounded the

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quivering body for a moment. The Big Business Man handed him a napkin from the tray and the Very Young Man wrapped up the alligator and threw it into the waste-basket.

Then he rose to his feet and tossed the paper weight onto the desk with a crash.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, turning back to them with flushed face, "those drugs sure do work. We're going into the ring all right, three weeks from tonight, and nothing on earth can stop us."

CHAPTER III

THE ESCAPE OF THE DRUG

FOR the next hour the four friends busily planned their preparations for the journey. When they began to discuss the details of the trip, and found themselves face to face with so hazardous an adventure, each discovered a hundred things in his private life that needed attention.

The Doctor's phrase, "My patients can go to the devil," seemed to relieve his mind of all further responsibility toward his personal affairs.

"That's all very well for you," said the Big Business Man. "I've too many irons in the fire just to drop everything—there are too many other people concerned. And I've got to plan as though I were never coming back, you know."

"Your troubles are easy," said the Very Young Man. "I've got a girl. I wonder what she'll say. Oh, gosh, I can't tell her where I'm going, can I? I never thought of that." He scratched his head with a perplexed air. "That's tough on her. Well, I'm glad I'm an orphan, anyway."

The actual necessities of the trip needed little discussion, for what they could take with them amounted to practically nothing to speak of.

"As I understand it," said the Banker, "all I have to do is watch you start, and then take the ring back to the museum."

"Take it carefully," continued the Very Young Man. "Remember what it's got in it."

"You will give us about two hours to get well started down," said the Doctor. "After that it will be quite safe to move the ring. You can take it back to the Society in that case I brought it here in."

"Be sure you take it yourself," put in the Very Young Man. "Don't trust it to anybody else. And how about having that wire rack fixed for it at the museum?" he added. "Don't forget that."

"I'll have that done myself this week," said the Doctor.

They had been talking for perhaps an hour when the Banker got up from his chair to get a fresh cigar from a box that lay upon the desk. He happened to glance across the room and on the floor in the corner by the closed door he saw a long, flat object that had not been there before. It was out of the circle of light and being brown against the polished hardwood floor, he could not make it out clearly. But something about it frightened him.

"What's that over there?" he asked, standing still and pointing.

The Big Business Man rose from his seat and took a few steps in the direction of the Banker's outstretched hand. Then with a muttered oath he jumped to the desk in a panic and picking up the heavy paper weight flung it violently across the room. It struck the paneled wall with a crash and bounded back toward him. At the same instant there came a scuttling sound from the floor, and a brown shape slid down the edge of the room and stopped in the other corner.

All four men were on their feet in an instant, white-faced and trembling.

"Good Heavens," said the Big Business Man huskily, "that thing over there—that—"

"Turn on the side lights—the side lights!" shouted the Doctor, running across the room.

In the glare of the unshaded globes on the wall the room was brightly lighted. On the floor in the corner the horrified men saw a roach nearly eighteen inches in length, with its head facing the angle of wall, and scratching with its legs against the base board as though about to climb

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up. For a moment the men stood silent with surprise and terror. Then, as they stared they saw the roach was getting larger. The Big Business Man laid his hand on the Doctor's arm with a grip that made the Doctor wince.

"Goodness, man, look at it—it's growing," he said in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"It's growing," echoed the Very Young Man; *"it's growing!"*

And then the truth dawned upon them, and brought with it confusion, almost panic. The roach, fully two feet long now, had raised the front end of its body a foot above the floor, and was reaching up the wall with its legs.

The Banker made a dash for the opposite door. "Let's get out of here. Come on!" he shouted.

The Doctor stopped him. Of the four men, he was the only one who had retained his self-possession.

"Listen to me," he said. His voice trembled a little in spite of his efforts to control it. "Listen to me. That—that—thing cannot harm us yet." He looked from one to the other of them and spoke swiftly. "It's gruesome and loathsome, but it is not dangerous yet. But we cannot run from it. We must kill it—here, now, before it gets any larger."

The Banker tore himself loose and started again toward the door.

"You fool!" said the Doctor, with a withering look. "Don't you see, it's life or death later? That thing will be as big as this house in half an hour. Don't you know that? As big as this house. We've got to kill it now—now."

The Big Business Man ran toward the paper weight. "I'll hit it with this," he said.

"You can't," said the Doctor; "you might miss. We haven't time. Look at it," he added.

The roach was noticeably larger now—considerably over two feet; it had turned away from the wall to face them.

The Very Young Man had said nothing; only stood and stared with bloodless face and wide-open eyes. Then suddenly he stooped, and picking up a small rug from the floor—a rug some six feet long and half as wide—advanced slowly toward the roach.

"That's the idea," encouraged the Doctor. "Get it under that. Here, give me part of it." He grasped a corner of the rug. "You two go up the other sides"—he pointed with his free hand—"and head it off if it runs."

SLOWLY the four men crept forward. The roach, three feet long now, was a hideous, horrible object as it stood backed into the corner of the room, the front part of its body swaying slowly from side to side.

"We'd better make a dash for it," whispered the Very Young Man. And jerking the rug loose from the Doctor's grasp, he leaped forward and flung himself headlong upon the floor, with the rug completely under him.

"I've got the damned thing. I've got it!" he shouted. "Help—you. Help!"

The three men leaped with him upon the rug, holding it pinned to the floor. The Very Young Man, as he lay, could feel the curve of the great body underneath, and could hear the scratch of its many legs upon the floor.

"Hold down the edges of the rug!" he cried. "Don't let it out. Don't let it get out. I'll mash it." He raised himself on his hands and knees, and came down heavily. The rug gave under his thrust as the animal flattened out; then they could hear again the muffled scratching of its legs upon the floor as it raised the rug up under the Very Young Man's weight.

"We can't kill it," panted the Big Business Man. "Oh, we can't kill it. Good God, how big it is!"

The Very Young Man got to his feet and stood unsteadily on the bulge of the rug. Then he jumped into the air and landed solidly on his heels. There was a sharp crack as the shell of the animal broke under the sharpness of his blow.

"That did it; that'll do it!" he shouted. Then he leaped again.

"Let me," said the Big Business Man.

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"I'm heavier;" and he, too, stamped upon the rug with his heels.

They could hear the huge shell of the animal's back smash under his weight, and when he jumped again the squash of its body as he mashed it down.

"Wait," said the Doctor. "We've killed it."

They eased upon the rug a little, but there was no movement from beneath.

"Jump on it harder," said the Very Young Man. "Don't let's take a chance. Mash it good."

The Big Business Man continued stamping violently upon the rug, joined now by the Very Young Man. The Doctor sat on the floor beside it, breathing heavily; the Banker lay in a heap at its foot in utter collapse.

As they stamped, the rug continued to flatten down. It sank under their tread with a horrible, sickening, squashing sound.

"Let's look," suggested the Very Young Man. "It must be dead"; and he threw back a corner of the rug. The men turned sick and faint at what they saw.

Underneath the rug, mashed against the floor, lay a great, noisome, semiliquid mass of brown and white. It covered nearly the entire under-surface of the rug—a hundred pounds, perhaps, of loathsome pulp and shell, from which a stench arose that stopped their breathing.

With a muttered imprecation the Doctor flung back the rug to cover it, and sprang to his feet, steadying himself against a chair.

"We killed it in time, thank God," he murmured and dropped into the chair, burying his face in his hands.

For a time silence fell upon the room, broken only by the labored breathing of the four men. Then the Big Business Man sat up suddenly. "Oh, my God, what an experience!" he groaned, and got unsteadily to his feet.

The Very Young Man helped the Banker up and led him to a seat by the window, which he opened, letting in the fresh, cool air of the night.

"How did the drug get loose, do you suppose?" asked the Very Young Man, coming back to the center of the room. He had recovered his composure somewhat, though he was still very pale. He lighted a cigarette and sat down beside the Doctor.

The Doctor raised his head wearily. "I suppose we must have spilled some of it on the floor," he said, "and the roach—" He stopped abruptly and sprang to his feet.

"Good Heavens!" he cried. "Suppose another bug—"

On the bare floor beside the table they came upon a few drops of water.

"That must be it," said the Doctor. He pulled his handkerchief from his pocket; then he stopped in thought. "No, that won't do. What shall we do with it?" he added. "We must destroy it absolutely. Good Lord, if that drug ever gets loose upon the world—"

The Big Business Man joined them.

"We must destroy it absolutely," repeated the Doctor. "We can't just wipe it up."

"Some acid," suggested the Big Business Man.

"Suppose something else has got at it already," the Very Young Man said in a scared voice, and began hastily looking around the floor of the room.

"You're right," agreed the Doctor. "We mustn't take any chance; we must look thoroughly."

Joined by the Banker, the four men began carefully going over the room.

"You'd better watch that nothing gets at it," the Very Young Man thought suddenly to say. The Banker obediently sat down by the little pool of water on the floor.

"And I'll close the window," added the Very Young Man; "something might get out."

They searched the room thoroughly, carefully scanning its wall and ceiling, but could see nothing out of the ordinary.

"We'll never be quite sure," said the Doctor finally, "but I guess we're safe. It's the best we can do now, at any rate."

He joined the Banker by the table. "I'll

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get some nitric acid," he added. "I don't know what else—"

"We'll have to get that out of here, too," said the Big Business Man, pointing to the rug. "Goodness knows how we'll explain it."

The Doctor picked up one of the tin boxes of drugs and held it in his hand meditatively. Then he looked over toward the rug. From under one side a brownish liquid was oozing; the Doctor shuddered.

"My friends," he said, holding up the box before them, "we can realize now something of the terrible power we have created and imprisoned here. We must guard it carefully, gentlemen, for if it escapes, it will destroy the world."

CHAPTER IV

THE START

ON THE evening of November 4, 1923, the four friends again assembled at the Scientific Club for the start of their momentous adventure. The Doctor was the last to arrive, and found the other three anxiously awaiting him. He brought with him the valise containing the ring and a suit-case with the drugs and equipment necessary for the journey. He greeted his friends gravely.

"The time has come, gentlemen," he said, putting the suit-case on the table.

The Big Business Man took out the ring and held it in his hand thoughtfully.

"The scene of our new life," he said with emotion. "What does it hold in store for us?"

"What time is it?" asked the Very Young Man. "We've got to hurry. We want to get started on time—we mustn't be late."

"Everything's ready, isn't it?" asked the Banker. "Who has the belts?"

"They're in my suit-case," answered the Very Young Man. "There it is."

The Doctor laid the ring and handkerchief on the floor, under the light, and began unpacking from his bag the drugs and the few small articles they had decided to try and take with them. "You have the food and water," he said.

The Big Business Man produced three small flasks of water and six flat, square tins containing compressed food. The Very Young Man opened one of them. "Chocolate soldiers we are," he said, and laughed.

The Banker was visibly nervous and just a little frightened. "Are you sure you haven't forgotten something?" he asked quaveringly.

"It wouldn't make a great deal of difference if we had," said the Doctor, with a smile. "The belts may not contract with us at all; we may have to leave them behind."

"Rogers didn't take anything," put in the Very Young Man. "Come on; let's get undressed."

The Banker locked the doors and sat down to watch the men make their last preparations. They spoke little while they were disrobing; the solemnity of what they were about to do both awed and frightened them. Only the Very Young Man seemed exhilarated by the excitement of the coming adventure.

In a few moments the three men were dressed in their white woolen bathing suits. The Very Young Man was the first to be equipped.

"I'm ready," he announced. "All but the chemicals. Where are they?"

Around his waist he had strapped a broad cloth belt, with a number of pockets fastened to it. On his feet were felt-lined cloth shoes, with hard rubber soles; he wore a wrist watch. Under each armpit was fastened the pouch for carrying the drugs.

"Left arm for red vials," said the Doctor. "Be sure of that—we mustn't get them mixed. Take two of each color." He handed the Very Young Man the tin boxes.

All the men were ready in a moment more.

"Five minutes of eight," said the Very Young Man, looking at his watch. "We're right on time; let's get started."

The Banker stood up among them. "Tell me what I've got to do," he said helplessly. "You're all going but me; I'll be left behind alone."

The Big Business Man laid his hand on

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the Banker's arm affectionately. "Don't look so sad, George," he said, with an attempt at levity. "We're not leaving you forever—we're coming back."

The Banker pressed his friend's hand. His usual crusty manner was quite gone now; he seemed years older.

The Doctor produced the same spoon he had used when the Chemist made his departure into the ring. "I've kept it all this time," he said, smiling. "Perhaps it will bring us luck." He handed it to the Banker.

"What you have to do is this," he continued seriously. "We shall all take an equal amount of the drug at the same instant. I hope it will act upon each of us at the same rate, so that we may diminish uniformly in size, and thus keep together."

"Gosh!" said the Very Young Man. "I never thought of that. Suppose it doesn't act as you say?"

"Then we shall have to adjust the difference by taking other smaller amounts of the drug. But I think probably it will.

"You must be ready," he went on to the Banker, "to help us on to the ring if necessary."

"Or put us back if we fall off," said the Very Young Man. "I'm going to sit still until I'm pretty small. Gracious, it's going to feel funny."

"After we have disappeared," continued the Doctor, "you will wait, say, until eleven o'clock. Watch the ring carefully—some of us may have to come back before that time. At eleven o'clock pack up everything." He looked around the littered room with a smile. "And take the ring back to the Biological Society."

"Keep your eye on it on the way back," warned the Very Young Man. "Suppose we decide to come out some time later tonight—you can't tell."

"I'll watch it all night tonight, here and at the Museum," said the Banker, mopping his forehead.

"Good scheme," said the Very Young Man approvingly. "Anything might happen."

"Well, gentlemen," said the Doctor. "I believe we're all ready. Come on, Will."

The Big Business Man was standing by the window, looking out intently. He evidently did not hear the remark addressed to him, for he paid no attention. The Doctor joined him.

THROUGH the window they could see the street below, crowded now with scurrying automobiles. The sidewalks were thronged with people—theatergoers, hurrying forward, seeking eagerly their evening's pleasure. It had been raining, and the wet pavements shone with long, blurred yellow glints from the thousands of lights above. Down the street they could see a huge blazing theater sign, with the name of a popular actress spelled in letters of fire.

The Big Business Man threw up the window sash and took a deep breath of the moist, cool air of the night.

"Good by, old world," he murmured with emotion. "Shall I see you again, I wonder?" He stood a moment longer, silently staring at the scene before him. Then abruptly he closed the window, pulled down the shade, and turned back to the room.

"Come on," said the Very Young Man impatiently. "It's five minutes after eight. Let's get started."

"Just one thing before we start," said the Doctor, as they gathered in the center of the room. "We must understand, gentlemen, from the moment we first take the drug, until we reach our final smallest size, it is imperative, or at least highly desirable, that we keep together. We start by taking four of the pellets each, according to the memoranda Rogers left. By Jove!" he interrupted himself, "that's one thing important we did nearly forget."

He went to his coat, and from his wallet took several typewritten sheets of paper.

"I made three copies," he said, handing them to his companions. "Put them away carefully; the front pocket will be most convenient, probably.

"It may not be hard for us to keep together," continued the Doctor. "On the other hand, we may find it extremely difficult, if not impossible. In the latter event we will meet at the city of Arite.

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"There are two things we must consider. First, we shall be constantly changing size with relation to our surroundings. In proportion to each other, we must remain normal in size if we can. Secondly we shall be traveling—changing position in our surroundings. So far as that aspect of the trip is concerned, it will not be more difficult for us to keep together, probably, than during any adventurous journey here in this world.

"If through accident or any unforseen circumstance we are separated in size, the one being smallest shall wait for the others. That can be accomplished by taking a very small quantity of the other drug—probably merely by touching one of the pellets to the tongue. Do I make myself clear?" His friends nodded assent.

"If any great separation in relative size occurs," the Doctor went on, "a discrepancy sufficient to make the smallest of us invisible for a time to the others, then another problem presents itself. We must be very careful, in that event, not to change our position in space—not to keep on traveling, in other words—or else, when we become the same size once more, we will be out of sight of one another. Geographically separated, so to speak," the Doctor finished with a smile.

"I am so explicit on this point of keeping together," he continued, "because—well, I personally do not want to undertake even part of this journey alone."

"You're darn right. Me neither," agreed the Very Young Man emphatically. "Let's get going."

"I guess that's all," said the Doctor, with a last glance around, and finally facing the Banker. "Good-by, George."

The Banker was quite overcome, and without a word he shook hands with each of his friends.

The three men sat beside each other on the floor, close to the handkerchief and ring; the Banker sat in his chair on the other side, facing them, spoon in hand. In silence they each took four of the pellets. Then the Banker saw them close their eyes; he saw the Big Business Man put his hands suddenly on the floor as though to steady himself.

The Banker gripped the arms of his chair firmly. He knew exactly what to expect, yet now when his friends began slowly to diminish in size he was filled with surprise and horror. For several minutes no one spoke. Then the Very Young Man opened his eyes, looked around dizzily for an instant, and began feeling with his hands the belt at his waist, his shoes, wrist-watch, and the pouches under his armpits.

"It's all right," he said with an enthusiasm that contrasted strangely with the tremor of his voice. "The belt's getting smaller, too. We're going to be able to take everything with us."

Again silence fell on the room, broken only by the sound of the three men on the floor continually shifting their positions as they grew smaller. In another moment the Doctor clambered unsteadily to his feet and, taking a step backward, leaned up against the cylindrical mahogany leg of the center-table, flinging his arms around it. His head did not reach the table top.

The Very Young Man and the Big Business Man were on their feet now, too, standing at the edge of the handkerchief, and clinging to one another for support. The Banker looked down at them and tried to smile. The Very Young Man waved his hand, and the Banker found voice to say: "Good-by, my boy."

"Good-by, sir," echoed the Very Young Man. "We're making it."

Steadily they grew smaller. By this time the Doctor had become far too small for his arms to encircle the leg of the table. The Banker looked down to the floor, and saw him standing beside the table leg, leaning one hand against it as one would lean against the great stone column of some huge building.

"Good-by, Frank," said the Banker. But the Doctor did not answer; he seemed lost in thought.

Several minutes more passed in silence. The three men had diminished in size now until they were not more than three inches high. Suddenly the Very Young Man let

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go of the Big Business Man's arm and looked around to where the Doctor was still leaning pensively against the table leg. The Banker saw him speak swiftly to the Big Business Man, but in so small a voice he could not catch the words. Then both little figures turned toward the table, and the Banker saw the Very Young Man put his hands to his mouth and shout. And upward to him came the shrillest, tiniest little voice he had ever heard, yet a voice still embodying the characteristic intonation of the Very Young Man.

"Hey, Doctor!" came the words. "You'll never get here if you don't come now."

The Doctor looked up abruptly; he evidently heard the words and realized his situation. (He was by this time not more than an inch and a half in height.) He hesitated only a moment, and then, as the other two little figures waved their arms wildly, he began running toward them. For more than a minute he ran. The Very Young Man started toward him, but the Doctor waved him back, redoubling his efforts.

WHEN he arrived at the edge of the handkerchief, evidently he was nearly winded, for he stopped beside his friends, and stood breathing heavily. The Banker leaned forward, and could see the three little figures (they were not as big as the joint of his little finger) talking earnestly; the Very Young Man was gesticulating wildly, pointing toward the ring. One of them made a start toward it, but the others called him back.

Then they began waving their arms, and all at once the Banker realized they were waving at him. He leaned down, and by their motions knew that something was wrong—that they wanted him to do something.

Trembling with fright, the Banker left his chair and knelt upon the floor. The Very Young Man made a funnel of his hands and shouted up: "It's too far away. We can't make it; we're too small!"

The Banker looked his bewilderment. Then he thought suddenly of the spoon that he still held in his hand, and he put it down toward them. The three little figures ducked and scattered as the spoon in the Banker's trembling fingers neared them.

"Not that—the ring. Bring it closer. Hurry—hurry!" shouted the Very Young Man. The Banker, leaning closer, could just hear the words. Comprehending at last, he picked up the ring and laid it near the edge of the handkerchief. Immediately the little figures ran over to it and began climbing up.

The Very Young Man was the first to reach it; the Banker could see him vault upward and land astraddle upon its top. The Doctor was up in a moment more, and the two were reaching down their hands to help up the Big Business Man. The Banker slid the spoon carefully along the floor toward the ring, but the Big Business Man waved it away. The Banker laid the spoon aside, and when he looked at the ring again the Big Business Man was up beside his companions, standing upright with them upon the top of the ring.

The Banker stared so long and intently, his vision blurred. He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again the little figures on the top of the ring had disappeared.

The Banker felt suddenly sick and faint in the closeness of the room. Rising to his feet, he hurried to a window and threw up the sash. A gust of rain and wind beat against his face as he stood leaning on the sill. He felt much better after a few moments; and remembering his friends, he closed the window and turned back toward the ring. At first he thought he could just make them out, but when he got down on the floor close beside the ring, he saw nothing.

Almost unnerved, he sat down heavily upon the floor beside the handkerchief, leaning on one elbow. A corner of the handkerchief was turned back, and one side was ruffled where the wind from the opened window had blown it up. He smoothed out the handkerchief carefully.

For some time the Banker sat quiet, reclining uncomfortably upon the hard floor.

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The room was very still—its silence oppressed him. He stared stolidly at the ring his head in a turmoil. The ring looked oddly out of place, lying over near one edge of the handkerchief; he had always seen it in the center before. Abruptly he put out his hand and picked it up. Then remembrance of the Doctor's warning flooded over him. In sudden panic he put the ring down again, almost in the same place at the edge of the handkerchief.

Trembling all over, he looked at his watch; it was a quarter of nine. He rose stiffly to his feet and sank into his chair. After a moment he lighted a cigar. The handkerchief lay at his feet; he could just see the ring over the edge of his knees. For a long time he sat staring.

The striking of a church clock near by roused him. He shook himself together and blinked at the empty room. In his hand he held an unlighted cigar; mechanically he raised it to his lips. The sound of the church bells died away; the silence of the room and the loneliness of it made him shiver. He looked at his watch again. Ten o'clock! Still another hour to wait and watch, and then he could take the ring back to the Museum. He glanced down at the ring; it was still lying by the edge of the handkerchief.

Again the Banker fell into a stupor as he stared at the glistening gold band lying on the floor at his feet. How lonely he felt! Yet he was not alone, he told himself. His three friends were there still, hardly two feet from the toe of his shoe. He wondered how they were making out. Would they come back any moment? Would they ever come back?

And then the Banker found himself worrying because the ring was not in the center of the handkerchief.

He felt frightened, and he wondered why. Again he looked at his watch. They had been gone more than two hours now. Swiftly he stooped, and lifting the ring, gazed at it searchingly, holding it very close to his eyes. Then he carefully put it down in the center of the handkerchief, and lay back in his chair with a long sigh of relief. It was all right now; just a little while to wait, and then he could take it back to the Museum. In a moment his eyes blinked, closed, and soon he was fast asleep, lying sprawled out in the big leather chair and breathing heavily.

CHAPTER V

PERILOUS WAYS

THE Very Young Man sat on the floor, between his two friends at the edge of the handkerchief, and put the first pellets of the drug to his tongue. His heart was beating furiously; his forehead was damp with the sweat of excitement and of fear. The pellets tasted sweet, and yet a little acrid. He crushed them in his mouth and swallowed them hastily.

In the silence of the room, the ticking of his watch suddenly sounded very loud. He raised his arm and looked at its face; it was just ten minutes past eight. He continued to stare at its dial, wondering why nothing was happening to him. Then all at once the figures on the watch became very sharp and vivid; he could see them with microscopic clearness. A buzzing sounded in his ears.

He remembered having felt the same way just before he fainted. He drew a deep breath and looked around the room; it swam before his gaze. He closed his eyes and waited, wondering if he would faint. The buzzing in his head grew louder; a feeling of nausea possessed him.

After a moment his head cleared; he felt better. Then all at once he realized that the floor upon which he sat was moving. It seemed to be shifting out from under him in all directions. He sat with his feet flat upon the floor, his knees drawn close against his chin. And the floor seemed to be carrying his feet farther out; he constantly had to be pulling them back against him. He put one hand down beside him, and could feel his fingers dragging very slowly as the polished surface moved past. The noise in his head was almost gone now. He opened his eyes.

Before him, across the handkerchief, the

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Banker sat in his chair. He had grown enormously in size, and as the Very Young Man looked he could see him and the chair growing steadily larger. He met the Banker's anxious glance, and smiled up at him. Then he looked at his two friends, sitting on the floor beside him. They alone, of everything within his range of vision, had grown no larger.

The Very Young Man thought of the belt around his waist. He put his hand to it, and found it tight as before. So, after all, they would not have to leave anything behind, he thought.

The Doctor rose to his feet and turned away, back under the huge table that loomed up behind him. The Very Young Man got up, too, and stood beside the Big Business Man, holding to him for support. His head felt strangely confused; his legs were weak and shaky.

Steadily larger grew the room and everything in it. The Very Young Man turned his eyes up to the light high overhead. Its great electric bulbs dazzled him with their brilliancy; its powerful glare made objects around as bright as though in daylight. After a moment the Big Business Man's grip on his arm tightened.

"It's weird!" he said in a tense whisper. "Look!"

Before them spread a great, level, shining expanse of black, with the ring in its center —a huge golden circle. Beyond the farther edge of the black they could see the feet of the banker, and the lower part of his legs stretching into the air far above them.

The Very Young Man looked up still higher, and saw the Banker staring down at him. "Good-by, my boy," said the Banker. His voice came from far away in a great roar to the Very Young Man's ears.

"Good-by, sir," said the Very Young Man, and waved his hand.

Several minutes passed, and still the Very Young Man stood holding to his companion, and watching the expanse of handkerchief widening out and the gleaming ring growing larger. Then he thought of the Doctor, and turned suddenly to look behind him. Across the wide, glistening surface of the floor stood the Doctor, leaning against the tremendous column that the Very Young Man knew was the leg of the center-table. And as the Very Young Man stood staring, he could see this distance between them growing steadily greater. A sudden fear possessed him, and he shouted to his friend.

"Good Lord, suppose he can't make it!" said the Big Business Man fearfully.

"He's coming," answered the Very Young Man. "He's got to make it."

The Doctor was running toward them now, and in a few moments he was beside them, breathing heavily.

"Close call, Frank," said the Big Business Man, shaking his head. "You were the one said we must keep together." The Doctor was too much out of breath to answer.

"This is worse," said the Very Young Man. "Look where the ring is."

More than two hundred yards away across the black expanse of silk handkerchief lay the ring.

"It's almost as high as our waist now, and look how far it is!" added the Very Young Man excitedly.

"It's getting farther every minute," said the Big Business Man. "Come on," and he started to run toward the ring.

"I can't make it. It's too far!" shouted the Doctor after him.

The Big Business Man stopped short. "What'll we do?" he asked. "We've got to get there."

"That ring will be a mile away in the few minutes, at the rate it's going," said the Very Young Man.

"We'll have to get him to move it over here," decided the Doctor, looking up into the air, and pointing.

"Gee, I never thought of that!" said the Very Young Man. "Oh, great Scott, look at him!"

OUT across the broad expanse of handkerchief they could see the huge white face of their friend looming four or five hundred feet in the air above them. It was the most astounding sight their eyes had ever beheld; yet so confused were they by

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the flood of new impressions to which they were being subjected that this colossal figure added little to their surprise.

"We must make him move the ring over here," repeated the Doctor.

"You'll never make him hear you," said the Big Business Man, as the Very Young Men began shouting at the top of his voice.

"We've got to," said the Very Young Man breathlessly. "Look at that ring. We can't get to it now. We're stranded here. Good Lord! What's the matter with him—can't he see us?" he added, and began shouting again.

"He's getting up," said the Doctor. They could see the figure of the Banker towering in the air a thousand feet above the ring, and then with a swoop his enormous face came down to them as he knelt upon the floor.

With his hands to his mouth, the Very Young Man shouted up: "It's too far away. We can't make it—we're too small." They waited. Suddenly, without warning, a great wooden oval bowl fifteen or twenty feet across came at them with tremendous speed. They scattered hastily in terror.

"Not that—the ring!" shouted the Very Young Man, as he realized it was the spoon in the Banker's hand that had frightened them.

A moment more and the ring was before them, lying at the edge of the handkerchief—a circular pit of rough yellow rock, breast high. They ran over to it and climbed upon its top.

Another minute and the ring had grown until its top became a narrow curving path upon which they could stand. They got upon their feet and looked around curiously.

"Well, we're here," remarked the Very Young Man. "Everything's O.K. so far. Let's get right around after that scratch."

"Keep together," cautioned the Doctor, and they started off along the path, following its inner edge.

As they progressed, the top of the ring steadily became broader; the surface underfoot became rougher. The Big Business Man, walking nearest the edge, pulled his companions toward him. "Look there!" he said. They stood cautiously at the edge and looked down.

Beneath them the ring bulged out. Over the bulge they could see the black of the handkerchief—a sheer hundred-foot drop. The ring curved sharply to the left; they could follow its wall all the way around; it formed a circular pit some two hundred and fifty feet in diameter.

A gentle breeze fanned their faces as they walked. The Very Young Man looked up into the gray of the distance overhead. A little behind, over his shoulder he saw above him in the sky a great, gleaming light many times bigger than the sun. It cast on the ground before him an opaque shadow, blurred about the edges.

"Pretty good day at that," remarked the Very Young Man, throwing out his chest.

The Doctor laughed. "It's half past eight at night," he said. "And if you'll remember half an hour ago, it's a very stormy night, too."

The Big Business Man stopped short in his walk. "Just think," he said, pointing up into the gray of the sky with a note of awe in his voice, "over there, not more than fifteen feet away, is a window looking down toward the Gaiety Theater and Broadway."

The Very Young Man looked bewildered. "That window's a hundred miles away," he said positively.

"Fifteen feet," said the Big Business Man. "Just beyond the table."

"It's all in the viewpoint," said the Doctor, and laughed again.

They had recovered their spirits by now, the Very Young Man especially seeming imbued with the enthusiasm of adventure.

The path became constantly rougher as they advanced. The ground underfoot—a shaggy, yellow, metallic ore—was strewn now with pebbles. These pebbles grew larger farther on, becoming huge rocks and boulders that greatly impeded their progress.

They soon found it difficult to follow the brink of the precipice. The path had broadened now so that its other edge was

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out of sight, for they could see only a short distance amid the boulders that everywhere tumbled about, and after a time they found themselves wandering along, lost in the barren waste.

"How far is the scratch, do you suppose?" the Very Young Man wanted to know.

They stopped and consulted a moment; then the Very Young Man clambered up to the top of a rock. "There's a range of hills over there pretty close," he called down to them. "That must be the way."

They had just started again in the direction of the hills when, almost without warning, and with a great whistle and roar, a gale of wind swept down upon them. They stood still and looked at each other with startled faces, bracing with their feet against its pressure.

"Oh, golly, what's this?" cried the Very Young Man, and sat down suddenly upon the ground to keep from being blown forward.

The wind increased rapidly in violence until, in a moment, all three of the men were crouching upon the ground for shelter.

"Great Scott, this is a tornado!" ejaculated the Big Business Man. His words were almost lost amid the howling of the blast as it swept across the barren waste of rocks.

"Rogers never told us anything about this. It's getting worse every minute. I—" A shower of pebbles and a great cloud of metallic dust swept past, leaving them choking and gasping for breath.

The Very Young Man got upon his hands and knees.

"I'm going over there," he panted. "It's better."

CHAPTER VI

STRANGE EXPERIENCES

LED by the Very Young Man, the three crawled a few yards to where a cluster of boulders promised better shelter. Huddled behind this mass of rock, they found themselves protected in a measure from the violence of the storm. Lying there, they could see yellowish-gray clouds of sand go sweeping by, with occasionally a hail of tiny pebbles, blowing almost horizontal. Overhead, the sky was unchanged. Not a vestige of cloud was visible, only the gray-blue of an immense distance, with the huge gleaming light, like an enormous sun, hanging in its center.

The Very Young Man put his hand on the Doctor's arm. "It's going down," he said. Hardly were the words out of his mouth when, with even less warning than it began, the gale abruptly ceased. There remained only the pleasantly gentle breeze of a summer afternoon blowing against their faces. And this came from almost an opposite direction to the storm. The three men looked at one another in amazement.

"Well, I'll be—" ejaculated the Very Young Man. "What next?"

They waited for some time, afraid to venture out from the rocks among which they had taken refuge. Then, deciding that the storm, however unexplainable, was over for the time at least, they climbed to their feet and resumed their journey with bruised knees, but otherwise none the worse for the danger through which they had passed.

After walking a short distance they came up a little incline, and before them, hardly more than a quarter of a mile away, they could see a range of hills.

"The scratch must be behind those hills," said the Very Young Man, pointing.

"It's a long distance," said the Big Business Man thoughtfully. "We're still growing smaller—look."

Their minds had been so occupied that for some time they had forgotten the effect of the drug upon their stature. As they looked about them now they could see the rocks around them still increasing steadily in size, and could feel the ground shifting under their feet when they stood still.

"You're right; we're getting smaller," observed the Very Young Man. "How long before we'll stop, do you suppose?"

The Doctor drew the Chemist's memoranda from the pouch on his belt. "It says about five or six hours for the first four pellets," he read.

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The Very Young Man looked at his watch. "Quarter of nine. We've been less than an hour yet. Come on, let's keep going," and he started walking rapidly forward.

They walked for a time in silence. The line of hills before them grew visibly in size, and they seemed slowly to be nearing it.

"I've been thinking," began the Doctor as he glanced up at the hills. "There's one theory of Rogers' that was a fallacy. You remember he was quite positive that this change of stature became steadily more rapid, until it reached its maximum rate and then remained constant. If that were so we should probably be diminishing in size more rapidly now than when we first climbed onto the ring. If we had so much trouble getting to the ring then"—he smiled at the remembrance of their difficulty—"I don't see how we could ever get to those hills now."

"Gee, that's so," said the Very Young Man. "We'd never be able to get anywhere, would we?"

"How do you figure it works?" asked the Big Business Man.

The Doctor folded up the paper and replaced it in his belt. "I don't know," he answered. "I think probably it proceeds in cycles, like the normal rate of growth —times of rapid progress succeeded by periods of comparative inactivity."

"I never knew people grew that way," observed the Very Young Man.

"They do," said the Doctor. "And if these drugs produce the same effect we—" He got no further, for suddenly the earth seemed to rise swiftly under them, and they were thrown violently to the ground.

The Very Young Man, as he lay prone, looked upward, and he saw the sunlike light above fall swiftly down across the sky and disappear below the horizon, plunging the world about them into the gloom of a semi-twilight. A wind, fiercer than before, swept over them with a roar.

"The end of the world," murmured the Very Young Man to himself. And he wondered why he was not frightened.

Then came the feeling of an extraordinary lightness of body, as though the ground were dropping away from under him. The wind abruptly ceased blowing. He saw the ball of light rise swiftly from the horizon and mount upward in a great, gleaming arc to the zenith, where again it hung motionless.

The three men lay quiet, their heads reeling. Then the Very Young Man sat up dizzily and began feeling himself all over. "There's nothing wrong with me," he said lugubriously, meeting the eyes of his friends who apparently were also more surprised than hurt. "But—oh, my gosh, the whole universe went nutty!" he added to himself in awe.

"What did that?" asked the Big Business Man. He climbed unsteadily to his feet and sat upon a rock, holding his head in his hands.

The Doctor was up in a moment beside him. "We're not hurt," he said, looking at his companion. "Don't let's waste any more time—let's get into that valley." The Very Young Man could see by his manner that he knew or guessed what had happened.

"But say, what—" began the Very Young Man.

"Come on," interrupted the Doctor, and started walking ahead swiftly.

THERE was nothing for his two friends to do but to follow. They walked in silence, in single file, picking their way among the rocks. For a quarter of an hour or more they kept going, until finally they came to the ridge of hills, finding them enormous rocks, several hundred feet high, strewn closely together.

"The valley must be right beyond," said the Doctor. "Come on."

The spaces between these huge rocks were, some of them, fifty feet or more in width. Inside the hills the travelers found the ground even rougher than before, and it was nearly half an hour before they emerged on the other side.

Instead of the shallow valley they expected to find, they came upon a precipice —a sheer drop into a tremendous cañon

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half as wide possibly as it was deep. They could see down to its bottom from where they stood—the same rocky, barren waste as that through which they had been traveling. Across the cañon, on the other side, lay another line of hills.

"It's the scratch all right," said the Very Young Man, as they stopped near the brink of the precipice, "but, holy smoke! Isn't it big?"

"That's two thousand feet down there," said the Big Business Man, stepping cautiously nearer to the edge. "Rogers didn't say it was so deep."

"That's because we've been so much longer getting here," explained the Doctor.

"How are we going to get down?" asked the Very Young Man as he stood beside the Big Business Man within a few feet of the brink. "It's getting deeper every minute, don't forget that."

The Big Business Man knelt down and carefully approached to the very edge of the precipice. Then, as he looked over, he got upon his feet with a laugh of relief. "Come here," he said.

They joined him at the edge and, looking over, could see that the jagged roughness of the wall made the descent, though difficult, not exceptionally hazardous. Below them, not more than twenty feet, a wide ledge jutted out, and beyond that they could see other similar ledges and crevices that would afford a foothold.

"We can get down that," said the Very Young Man. "There's an easy place," and he pointed farther along the brink, to where a break in the edge seemed to offer a means of descent to the ledge just below.

"It's going to be a mighty long climb down," said the Big Business Man. "Especially as we're getting smaller all the time. I wonder," he added thoughtfully, "how would it be if we made ourselves larger before we started: We could get big enough, you know, so that it would only be a few hundred feet down there. Then, after we got down, we could get small again."

"That's a thought," said the Very Young Man.

The Doctor sat down somewhat wearily, and again took the papers from his belt. "The idea is a good one," he said. "But there's one thing you overlook. The larger we get, the smoother the wall is going to be. Look, can't you see it changing every moment?"

It was true. Even in the short time since they had first looked down, new crevices had opened up. The descent, though longer, was momentarily becoming less dangerous.

"You see," continued the Doctor, "if the valley were only a few hundred feet deep, the precipice might then be so sheer that we could not trust ourselves to it at all."

"You're right," observed the Big Business Man.

"Well, it's not very hard to get down now," said the Very Young Man. "Let's get going before it gets any deeper. Say," he added, "how about stopping our size where it is? How would that work?"

The Doctor was reading the papers he held in his hand. "I think," he said, "it would be our wisest course to follow as closely as possible what Rogers tells us to do. It may be harder, but I think we will avoid trouble in the end."

"We could get lost in size just as easily as in space, couldn't we?" the Big Business Man put in. "That's a curious idea, isn't it?"

"It's true," agreed the Doctor. "It is something we must guard against very carefully."

"Well, come on then, let's get going," said the Very Young Man, pulling the Doctor to his feet.

The Big Business Man glanced at his watch. "Twenty of ten," he said. Then he looked up into the sky. "One hour and a half ago," he added sentimentally, "we were up there. What will another hour bring, I wonder?"

"Nothing at all," said the Very Young Man, "if we don't ever get started. Come on."

He walked toward the place he had selected, followed by his companions. And thus the three adventurers began their descent into the ring.

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CHAPTER VII

THE VALLEY OF THE SCRATCH

FOR the first half-hour of their climb down into the valley of the scratch, the three friends were too preoccupied with their own safety to talk more than an occasional sentence. They came upon many places that at first glance appeared impassable, or at least sufficiently hazardous to cause them to hesitate, but in each instance the changing contour of the precipice offered some other means of descent.

After thirty minutes of arduous effort, the Big Business Man sat down suddenly upon a rock and began to unlace his shoes.

"I've got to rest a while," he groaned. "My feet are in terrible shape."

His two companions were glad of the opportunity to sit with him for a moment.

"Gosh, I'm all in, too!" said the Very Young Man with a sigh.

They were sitting upon a ledge about twenty feet wide, with the wall down which they had come at their back.

"I'll swear that's as far down there as it ever was," said the Big Business Man, with a wave of his hand toward the valley below them.

"Further," remarked the Very Young Man. "I've known that right along."

"That's to be expected," said the Doctor. "But we're a third the way down, just the same; that's the main thing." He glanced up the rocky, precipitous wall behind him. "We've come down a thousand feet, at least. The valley must be three thousand feet deep or more now."

"Say, how deep does it get before it stops?" inquired the Very Young Man.

The Doctor smiled at him quietly. "Rogers' notes put it about twelve thousand," he answered. "It should reach that depth and stop about"—he hesitated a moment, calculating— "about two o'clock," he finished.

"Some climb," commented the Very Young Man. "We could do this a lot better than we're doing it, I think."

For some time they sat in silence. From where they sat the valley had all the appearance of a rocky, barren cañon of their own world above, as it might have looked on the late afternoon of a cloudless summer day. A gentle breeze was blowing, and in the sky overhead they could still see the huge light that for them was the sun.

"The weather is certainly great down here anyway," observed the Very Young Man, "that's one consolation."

The Big Business Man had replaced his shoes, taken a swallow of water, and risen to his feet, preparing to start downward again, when suddenly they all noticed a curious swaying motion, as though the earth were moving under them.

"Now what?" ejaculated the Very Young Man, standing up abruptly, with his feet spread wide apart.

The ground seemed pressing against his feet as if he were weighted down with a heavy load. And he felt a little also, as though in a moving train with a side thrust to guard against. The sun was no longer visible, and the valley was plunged in the semi-darkness of twilight. A strong wind sprang up, sweeping down upon them from above.

The Very Young Man and the Big Business Man looked puzzled; the Doctor alone of the three seemed to understand what was happening.

"He's moving the ring," he explained, with a note of apprehension in his voice.

"Oh," ejaculated the Big Business Man, comprehending at last, "so that's the—"

The Very Young Man standing with his back to the wall and his legs spread wide looked hastily at his watch. "Moving the ring? Why, damn it—" he began impetuously.

The Big Business Man interrupted him. "Look there, look!" he almost whispered, awestruck.

The sky above the valley suddenly had become suffused with red. As they watched it seemed to take form, appearing no longer space, but filled with some enormous body of reddish color. In one place they could see it broken into a line of gray, and underneath the gray, two great circular holes of light gleamed down at them.

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The Doctor shuddered and closed his eyes; his two friends stared upward, fascinated into immobility.

"What—is—that?" the Very Young Man whispered.

Before he could be answered, the earth swayed under them more violently than before. The red faded back out of the sky, and the sun appeared sweeping up into the zenith, where it hung swaying a moment and then poised motionless. The valley was flooded again with light; the ground steadied under them and became quiet. The wind died rapidly away, and in another moment it was as though nothing unusual had occurred.

For a time the three friends stood silent, too astonished for words at this extraordinary experience. The Doctor was the first to recover himself. "He moved the ring," he said hurriedly. "That's twice. We must hurry."

"It's only quarter past ten. We told him not till eleven," protested the Very Young Man.

"Even that is too soon for safety," said the Doctor back over his shoulder, for already he had started downward.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when they stopped again for rest. At this time the valley appeared about seven or eight thousand feet deep: they estimated themselves to be slightly more than half-way down. From eleven until twelve they had momentarily expected some disturbing phenomena attendant upon the removal of the ring by the Banker from the clubroom to its place in the museum. But nothing unusual had occurred.

"He probably decided to leave it alone for a while," commented the Big Business Man, as they were discussing the matter. "Glad he showed that much sense."

"It would not bother us much now," the Doctor replied. "We're too far down. See how the light is changing."

THE sky showed now only as a narrow ribbon of blue between the edges of the cañon's walls. The sun was behind the wall down which they were climbing, out of sight, and throwing their side of the valley into shadow. And already they could begin to see a dim phosphorescence glowing from the rocks near at hand.

The Very Young Man, sitting beside the Doctor, suddenly gripped his friend by the arm. "A bird," he said, pointing down the valley. "See it there?"

From far off they could see a bird coming up the center of the valley at a height apparently almost level with their own position, and flying toward them. They watched it in silence as it rapidly approached.

"Great Scott, it's big!" muttered the Big Business Man in an undertone.

As the bird came closer they saw it was fully fifty feet across the wings. It was flying straight down the valley at tremendous speed. When it was nearly opposite them they heard a familiar "cheep, cheep," come echoing across the valley.

"The sparrow," whispered the Very Young Man. "Oh, my gosh, look how big it is!"

In another moment it had passed them; they watched in silence until it disappeared in the distance.

"Well," said the Very Young Man, "if that had ever seen us—" He drew a long breath, leaving the rest to the imagination of his hearers.

"What a wonderful thing!" said the Big Business Man, with a note of awe in his voice. "Just think—that sparrow when we last saw it was infinitesimally small."

The Doctor laughed. "It's far smaller now than it was then," he said. "Only since we last saw it we have changed size to a much greater extent than it has."

"Foolish of us to have sent it in here," remarked the Big Business Man casually. "Suppose that—" He stopped abruptly.

The Very Young Man started hastily to his feet.

"Oh, golly!" he exclaimed as the same thought occurred to him. "That alligator—" He looked about him wildly.

"It was foolish perhaps." The Doctor spoke quietly. "But we can't help it now. The sparrow has gone. That alligator may

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be right here at our feet"—the Very Young Man jumped involuntarily—"and so small we can't see it," the Doctor finished with a smile. "Oh it may be a hundred miles away and big as a dinosaur." The Very Young Man shuddered.

"It was senseless of us to let them get in here anyway," said the Big Business Man. "That sparrow evidently has stopped getting smaller. Do you realize how big it will be to us, after we've diminished a few hundred times more?"

"We needn't worry over it," said the Doctor. "Even if we knew the alligator got into the valley the chances of our seeing it here are one in a million. But we don't even know that. If you'll remember it was still some distance away from the scratch when it became invisible; I doubt very much if it ever got there. No, I think probably we'll never see it again."

"I hope not," declared the Very Young Man emphatically.

For another hour they climbed steadily downward, making more rapid progress than before, for the descent became constantly less difficult. During this time they spoke little, but it was evident that the Very Young Man, from the frequent glances he threw around, never for a moment forgot the possibility of encountering the alligator. The sparrow did not return, although for that, too, they were constantly on the lookout.

It was nearly half past one when the Big Business Man threw himself upon the ground exhausted. The valley at this time had reached a depth of over ten thousand feet. It was still growing deeper, but the travelers had made good progress and were not more than fifteen hundred feet above its bottom.

They had been under tremendous physical exertion for over five hours, too absorbed in their strange experiences to think of eating, and now all three agreed it was foolish to attempt to travel farther without food and rest.

"We had better wait here an hour or two," the Doctor decided. "Our size will soon remain constant and it won't take us long to get down after we've rested."

"I'm hungry," suggested the Very Young Man, "how about you?"

They ate and drank sparingly of the little store they had brought with them. The Doctor would not let them have much, both because he wanted to conserve their supply, and because he knew in their exhausted condition it would be bad for them to eat heartily.

It was about two o'clock when they noticed that objects around them no longer were increasing in size. They had finished their meal and felt greatly refreshed.

"Things have stopped growing," observed the Very Young Man. "We've done four pills' worth of the journey anyway," he added facetiously. He rose to his feet, stretching. He felt sore and bruised all over, but with the meal and a little rest, not particularly tired.

"I move we go on down now," he suggested, walking to the edge of the huge crevice in which they were sitting. "It's only a couple of thousand feet."

"Perhaps we might as well," agreed the Doctor, rising also. "When we get to the floor of the valley, we can find a good spot and turn in for the night."

The incongruity of his last words with the scene around made the Doctor smile. Overhead the sky still showed a narrow ribbon of blue. Across the valley the sunlight sparkled on the yellowish crags of the rocky wall. In the shadow, on the side down which they were climbing, the rocks now shone distinctly phosphorescent, with a peculiar waviness of outline.

"Not much like either night or day, is it?" added the Doctor.

They started off again, and in another two hours found themselves going down a gentle rocky slope and out upon the floor of the valley.

"We're here at last," said the Big Business Man wearily.

The Very Young Man looked up the great, jagged precipice down which they had come, to where, far above, its edge against the strip of blue marked the surface of the ring.

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"Some trip," he remarked. "I wouldn't want to tackle that every day."

"Four o'clock," said the Doctor, "the light up there looks just the same. I wonder what's happened to George."

Neither of his companions answered him. The Big Business Man lay stretched full length upon the ground near by, and the Very Young Man still stood looking up the precipice, was lost in thought.

"What a nice climb going back," he suddenly remarked.

The Doctor laughed. "Don't let's worry about that, Jack. If you remember how Rogers described it, getting back is easier than getting in. But the main point now," he added seriously, "is for us to make sure of getting down to Arite as speedily as possible."

The Very Young Man surveyed the barren waste around them in dismay. The floor of the valley was strewn with even larger rocks and boulders than those on the surface above, and looked utterly pathless and desolate. "What do we do first?" he asked dubiously.

"First," said the Doctor, smiling at the Big Business Man, who lay upon his back staring up into the sky and paying no attention to them whatever, "I think first we had better settle ourselves for a good long rest here."

"If we stop at all, let's sleep a while," said the Very Young Man. "A little rest only gets you stiff. It's a pretty exposed place out here though, isn't it, to sleep?" he added, thinking of the sparrow and the alligator.

"One of us will stay awake and watch," answered the Doctor.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PIT OF DARKNESS

AT THE suggestion of the Very Young Man they located without much difficulty a sort of cave amid the rocks, which offered shelter for their rest. Taking turns watching, they passed eight hours in fair comfort, and by noon next day, after another frugal meal they felt thoroughly refreshed and eager to continue the journey.

"We sure are doing this classy," observed the Very Young Man. "Think of Rogers—all he could do was fall asleep when he couldn't stay awake any more. Gosh, what chances he took!"

"We're playing it safe," agreed the Big Business Man.

"But we mustn't take it too easy," added the Doctor.

The Very Young Man stretched himself luxuriously and buckled his belt on tighter. "Well, I'm ready for anything," he announced. "What's next?"

The Doctor consulted his papers. "We find the circular pit Rogers made in the scratch and we descend into it. We take twelve more pills at the edge of the pit."

The Very Young Man leaped to the top of a rock and looked out over the desolate waste helplessly. "How are we going to find the pit?" he asked dubiously. "It's not in sight, that's sure."

"It's down there, about five miles," said the Doctor. "I saw it yesterday as we came down."

"That's easy," said the Very Young Man, and he started off enthusiastically, followed by the others.

In less than two hours they found themselves at the edge of the pit. It appeared almost circular in form, apparently about five miles across and its smooth, shining walls extended almost perpendicularly down into blackness. Somewhat awed by the task confronting them in getting down into this abyss, the three friends sat down near its brink to discuss their plan of action.

"We take twelve pills here," said the Doctor. "That ought to make us small enough to climb down into that."

"Do you think we need so many?" asked the Big Business Man thoughtfully. "You know, Frank, we're making an awful lot of work for ourselves, playing this thing so absolutely safe. Think of what a distance down that will be after we have gotten as small as twelve pills will make us. It might take us days to get to the bottom."

"How did Rogers get down?" the Very Young Man wanted to know.

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"He took the twelve pills here," the Doctor answered. "But as I understand it, he fell most of the way down while he was still big, and then got small afterward at the bottom."

"I don't know how about you," said the Very Young Man dryly, "but I'd much rather take three days to walk down than fall down in one day."

The Doctor smiled. "I still think," he said, "that we had better stick to the directions Rogers left us. Then at least there is no danger of our getting lost in size. But I agree with you, Jack. I'd rather not fall down, even if it takes longer to walk."

"I wonder—" began the Big Business Man. "You know I've been thinking, it does seem an awful waste of energy for us to let ourselves get smaller than absolutely necessary in climbing down these places. Maybe you don't realize it."

"I do," said the Very Young Man, looking sorrowfully at the ragged shoes on his feet and the cuts and bruises on his legs.

"What I mean is—" persisted the Big Business Man. "How far do you suppose we have actually traveled since we started last night?"

"That's pretty hard to estimate," said the Doctor. "We have walked perhaps fifteen miles altogether, besides the climb down. I suppose we actually came down five or six thousand feet."

"And at the size we are now it would have been twelve thousand feet down, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," answered the Doctor, "it would."

"And just think," went on the Big Business Man, "right now, based on the size we were when we began, we've only gone some six feet altogether from the place we started."

"And a sixteenth of an inch or less since we left the surface of the ring," said the Doctor, smiling.

"Gee, that's a weird thought," the Very Young Man said, as he gazed in awe at the lofty heights about them.

"I've been thinking," continued the Big Business Man. "You say we must be careful not to get lost in size. Well, suppose instead of taking twelve pills here, we only take six. That should be enough to get us started—possibly enough to get us all the way down. Then before we moved at all we could take the other six. That would keep it straight, wouldn't it?"

"Great idea," said the Very Young Man. "I'm in favor of that."

"It sounds feasible. Certainly if we can get all the way down with six pills, we will save a lot of climbing."

"If six aren't enough, we can easily take more," added the Big Business Man.

And so they decided only to take six pills of the drug and to get down to the bottom of the pit, if possible, without taking more. The pit, as they stood looking down into it now, seemed quite impossible of descent, for its almost perpendicular wall was smooth and shining as highly polished brass.

They took the drug, standing close together at the edge of the pit. Immediately began again the same crawling sensation underfoot, much more rapid this time, while all around them the rocks began very rapidly increasing in size.

The pit now seemed widening out at an astounding rate. In a few minutes it had broadened so that its opposite side could not be seen. The wall at the brink of which they stood had before curved in a great sweeping arc to enclose the circular hole. Now it stretched in a nearly straight, unbroken line to the right and left as far as they could see. Beneath them lay only blackness; it was as though they were at the edge of the world.

"Good Heavens, what a place to go down into!" gasped the Big Business Man, after they had been standing nearly half an hour in silence, appalled at the tremendous changes taking place around them.

For some time past the wall before them had become indented and broken enough to make possible their descent. It was the Doctor who first realized the time—or perhaps it should be said, the size—they were losing by their inactivity; and when with a few crisp words he brought them to themselves, they immediately started downward.

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FOR another six hours they traveled downward steadily, stopping only once to eat. The descent during this time was not unlike that down the side of the valley, although toward the last it began rapidly to grow less precipitous.

They now found themselves confronted frequently with gentle slopes downward, half a mile or more in extent, and sometimes by almost level places, succeeded by another sharp descent.

During this part of the trip they made more rapid progress than at any time since starting, the Very Young Man in his enthusiasm at times running forward and then sitting down to wait for the others to overtake him.

The light overhead gradually faded into the characteristic luminous blackness the Chemist had described. As it did so, the phosphorescent quality of the rocks greatly increased, or at least became more noticeable, so that the light illuminating the landscape became hardly less in volume, although totally different in quality.

The ground underfoot and the rocks themselves had been steadily changing. It had lost by this time almost entirely its yellowish, metal look, and seemed to have more the quality of a gray opaque glass, or marble. It appeared rather smoother, too, than before, although the huge boulders and loosely strewn rocks and pebbles still remained the characteristic feature of the landscape.

The three men were still diminishing in size; in fact, at this time the last dose of the drug seemed to have attained its maximum power, for objects around them appeared to be growing larger at a dizzying rate. They were getting used to this effect, however, to a great extent, and were no longer confused by the change as they had been before.

It was the Big Business Man who first showed signs of weakening, and at the end of six hours or more of steady—and, toward the end, extremely rapid—traveling he finally threw himself down and declared he could go no farther. At this point they rested again several hours, taking turns at watch, and each of them getting some measure of sleep. Of the three, the Very Young Man appeared in the best condition, although possibly it was his enthusiasm that kept him from admitting even to himself any serious physical distress.

It was perhaps ten or twelve hours after they had taken the six pills that they were again ready to start downward. Before starting the three adventurers discussed earnestly the advisability of taking the other six pills. The action of the drug had ceased some time before. They decided not to, since apparently there was no difficulty facing them at this part of the journey, and decreasing their stature would only immeasurably lengthen the distance they had to go.

They had been traveling downward, through a barren land that showed little change of aspect, for hardly more than another hour, when suddenly, without warning, they came upon the tremendous glossy incline that they had been expecting to reach for some time. The rocks and boulders stopped abruptly, and they found at their feet, sloping downward at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees, a great, smooth plane. It extended as far as they could see both to the right and left and downward, at a slightly lessening angle, into the luminous darkness that bounded their entire range of vision in every direction.

This plane seemed distinctly of a different substance than anything they had hitherto encountered. It was, as the Chemist had described it, apparently like a smooth black marble. Yet it was not so smooth to them as he had pictured it, for its surface was sufficiently indented and ridged to afford foothold.

They started down this plane gingerly, yet with an assumed boldness they were all of them far from feeling. It was slow work at first, and occasionally one or the other of them would slide headlong a score of feet, until a break in the smoothness brought him to a stop. Their rubber-soled shoes stood them in good stead here, for without the aid given by them this part of the journey would have been impossible.

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For several hours they continued this form of descent. The incline grew constantly less steep, until finally they were able to walk down it quite comfortably. They stopped again to eat, and after traveling what seemed to them some fifteen miles from the top of the incline they finally reached its bottom.

They seemed now to be upon a level floor—a ground of somewhat metallic quality such as they had become familiar with above. Only now there were no rocks or boulders, and the ground was smoother and with a peculiar corrugation. On one side lay the incline down which they had come. There was nothing but darkness to be seen in any other direction. Here they stopped again to rest and recuperate, and then they discussed their next movements.

The Doctor, seated wearily upon the ground, consulted his memoranda earnestly. The Very Young Man sat close beside him. As usual the Big Business Man lay prone upon his back near by, waiting for their decision.

"Rogers wasn't far from a forest when he got here," said the Very Young Man, looking sidewise at the papers in the Doctor's hand. "And he speaks of a tiny range of hills; but we can't see anything from here."

"We may not be within many miles of where Rogers landed," answered the Doctor.

"No reason why we should be, at that, is there? Do you think we'll ever find Arite?"

"Don't overlook the fact we've got six more pills to take here," called the Big Business Man.

"That's just what I was considering," said the Doctor thoughtfully. "There's no use our doing anything until we have attained the right size. Those hills and the forest and river we are looking for might be here right at our feet and we couldn't see them while we are as big as this."

"We'd better take the pills and stay right here until their action wears off. I'm going to take a sleep," said the Big Business Man.

"I think we might as well all sleep," said the Doctor. "There could not possibly be anything here to harm us."

They each took the six additional pills without further words. Physically exhausted as they were, and with the artificial drowsiness produced by the drug, they were all three in a few moments fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX

THE WELCOME OF THE MASTER

IT WAS nearly twelve hours later, as their watches showed them, that the first of the weary adventurers awoke. The Very Young Man it was who first opened his eyes with a confused sense of feeling that he was in bed at home, and that this was the momentous day he was to start his journey into the ring. He sat up and rubbed his eyes vigorously to see more clearly his surroundings.

Beside him lay his two friends, fast asleep. With returning consciousness came the memory of the events of the day and night before. The Very Young Man sprang to his feet and vigorously awoke his companions.

The action of the drug again had ceased, and at first glance the scene seemed to have changed very little. The incline now was some distance away, although still visible, stretching up in a great arc and fading away into the blackness above. The ground beneath their feet still of its metallic quality, appeared far rougher than before. The Very Young Man bent down and put his hand upon it. There was some form of vegetation there, and, leaning closer, he could see what appeared to be the ruins of a tiny forest, bent and trampled, the tree-trunks no larger than slender twigs that he could have snapped asunder easily between his fingers.

"Look at this," he exclaimed. "The woods—we're here."

The others knelt down with him.

"Be careful," cautioned the Doctor. "Don't move around. We must get smaller." He drew the papers from his pocket.

"Rogers was in doubt about the quantity

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to take," he added. "We should be now somewhere at the edge or in the forest he mentions. Yet we may be very far from the point at which he reached the bottom of that incline. I think, too, that we are somewhat larger than he was. Probably the strength of our drug differs from his to some extent."

"How much should we take next, I wonder?" asked the Big Business Man as he looked at his companions.

The Doctor took a pill and crushed it in his hand. "Let us take so much," he said, indicating a small portion of the powder. The others each crushed one of the pills and endeavored to take as nearly as possible an equal amount.

"I'm hungry," said the Very Young Man. "Can we eat right after the powder?"

"I don't think that should make any difference," the Doctor answered, and so accustomed to the drug were they now that, quite nonchalantly, they sat down and ate.

After a few moments it became evident that in spite of their care the amounts of the drug they had taken were far from equal.

Before they had half finished eating, the Very Young Man was hardly more than a third the size of the Doctor, with the Big Business Man about half-way between. This predicament suddenly struck them as funny, and all three laughed heartily at the effect of the drug.

"Hey, you, hurry up, or you'll never catch me," shouted the Very Young Man gleefully. "Gosh, but you're big." He reached up and tried to touch the Doctor's shoulder. Then, seeing the huge piece of chocolate in his friend's hand and comparing it with the little one in his own, he added: "Trade you chocolate. That's a regular meal you got there."

"That's a real idea," said the Big Business Man, ceasing his laughter abruptly. "Do you know, if we ever get really low on food, all we have to do is one of us stay big and his food would last the other two a month."

"Fine; but how about the big one?" asked the Very Young Man, grinning. "He'd starve to death on that plan, would he not?"

"Well, then he could get much smaller than the other two, and they could feed him. It's rather involved, I'll admit, but you know what I mean," the Big Business Man finished somewhat lamely.

"I've got a much better scheme than that," said the Very Young Man. "You let the food stay large and you get small. How about that?" he added triumphantly. Then he laid carefully on the ground beside him a bit of chocolate and a few of the hard crackers they were eating. "Stay there, little friends and when you grow up, I'll take you back," he added in a gleeful tone of voice.

"Strange that should never have occurred to us," said the Doctor. "It's a perfect way of replenishing our food supply," and quite seriously both he and the Big Business Man laid aside some of their food.

"Thank me for that brilliant idea," said the Very Young Man. Then, as another thought occurred to him, he scratched his head lugubriously. "Wouldn't work very well if we were getting bigger, would it? Don't let's ever get separated from any food coming out."

The Doctor was gigantic now in proportion to the other two, and both he and the Big Business Man took a very small quantity more of the drug in an effort to equalize their rate of bodily reduction. They evidently hit it about right, for no further change in their relative size occurred.

All this time the vegetation underneath had been growing steadily larger. From tiny broken twigs it grew to sticks bigger than their fingers, then to the thickness of their arms. They moved slightly from time to time, letting it spread out from under them, or brushing it aside and clearing a space in which they could sit more comfortably. Still larger it grew until the tree-trunks, thick now almost as their bodies, were lying broken and twisted all about them. Over to one side they could see, half a mile away, a place where the

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trees were still standing—slender saplings, they seemed growing densely together.

IN HALF an hour more the Very Young Man announced he had stopped getting smaller. The action of the drug ceased in the others a few minutes later. They were still not quite in their relative sizes, but a few grains of the powder quickly adjusted that.

They now found themselves near the edge of what once was a great forest. Huge trees, whose trunks measured six feet or more in diameter, lay scattered about upon the ground; not a single one was left standing. In the distance they could see, some miles away, where the untrodden forest began.

They had replaced the food in their belts some time before, and now again they were ready to start. Suddenly the Very Young Man spied a huge, round, whitish-brown object lying beside a tree-trunk near by. He went over and stood beside it. Then he called his friends excitedly. It was irregularly spherical in shape and stood higher than his knees—a great, jagged ball. The Very Young Man bent down, broke off a piece of the ball, and stuffing it into his mouth, began chewing with enthusiasm.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he remarked with a grin. "A cracker crumb I must have dropped when we first began lunch!"

They decided now to make for the nearest part of the unbroken forest. It was two hours before they reached it, for among the tangled mass of broken, fallen trees their progress was extremely difficult and slow. Once inside, among the standing trees, they felt more lost than ever. They had followed implicitly the Chemist's directions, and in general had encountered the sort of country they expected. Nevertheless, they all three realized that it was probable the route they had followed coming in was quite different from that taken by the Chemist; and in what direction lay their destination, and how far, they had not even the vaguest idea, but they were determined to go on.

"If we ever find this city of Arite, it'll be a miracle sure," the Very Young Man remarked as they were walking along in silence.

They had gone only a short distance farther when the Big Business Man, who was walking in front, stopped abruptly.

"What's that?" he asked in a startled undertone.

They followed the direction of his hand, and saw, standing rigid against a tree-trunk ahead, the figure of a man little more than half as tall as themselves, his grayish body very nearly the color of the blue-gray tree behind him.

The three adventurers stood motionless, staring in amazement.

As the Big Business Man spoke, the little figure, which had evidently been watching them for some time, turned irresolutely as though about to run. Then with gathering courage it began walking slowly toward them, holding out its arms with the hands palm up.

"He's friendly," whispered the Very Young Man; and they waited, silent, as the man approached.

As he came closer, they could see he was hardly more than a boy, perhaps twenty years of age. His lean, gray body was nearly naked. Around his waist he wore a drab-colored tunic, of a substance they could not identify. His feet and legs were bare. On his chest was strapped a thin stone plate, slightly convex. His thick, wavy, black hair, cut at the base of his neck, hung close about his ears. His head was uncovered. His features were regular and pleasing; his smile showed an even row of very white teeth.

The three men did not speak or move until, in a moment more, he stood directly before them, still holding out his hands palm up. Then abruptly he spoke.

"The Master welcomes his friends," he said in a soft, musical voice. He gave the words a most curious accent and inflection, yet they were quite understandable to his listeners.

"The Master welcomes his friends," he repeated, dropping his arms to his sides and smiling in a most friendly manner.

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The Very Young Man caught his breath. "He's been sent to meet us; he's from Rogers. What do you think of that? We're all right now!" he exclaimed excitedly.

The Doctor held out his hand, and the Oroid, hesitating a moment in doubt, finally reached up and grasped it.

"Are you from Rogers?" asked the Doctor.

The Oroid looked puzzled. Then he turned and flung out his arm in a sweeping gesture toward the deeper woods before them. "Rogers—Master," he said.

"You were waiting for us?" persisted the Doctor; but the other only shook his head and smiled his lack of comprehension.

"He only knows the first words he said," the Big Business Man suggested.

"He must be from Rogers," the Very Young Man put in. "See, he wants us to go with him."

The Oroid was motioning them forward, holding out his hand as though to lead them.

The Very Young Man started forward, but the Big Business Man held him back.

"Wait a moment," he said. "I don't think we ought to go among these people as large as we are. Rogers is evidently alive and waiting for us. Why wouldn't it be better to be about his size, instead of ten-foot giants as we would look now?"

"How do you know how big Rogers is?" asked the Very Young Man.

"I think that a good idea," agreed the Doctor. "Rogers described these Oroid men as being some six inches shorter than himself, on the average."

"This one might be a pygmy, for all we know," said the Very Young Man.

"We might chance it that he's of normal size," said the Doctor, smiling. "I think we should make ourselves smaller."

The Oroid stood patiently by and watched them with interested eyes as each took a tiny pellet from a vial under his arm and touched it to his tongue. When they began to decrease in size his eyes widened with fright and his legs shook under him. But he stood his ground, evidently assured by their friendly gestures.

In a few minutes the action of the drug was over, and they found themselves not more than a head taller than the Oroid. In this size he seemed to like them better, or at least he stood in far less awe of them, for now he seized them by the arms and pulled them forward vigorously. They laughingly yielded, and, led by this strange being of another world, they turned from the open places they had been following and plunged into the depths of the forest.

CHAPTER X

THE CHEMIST AND HIS SON

FOR an hour or more the three adventurers followed their strange guide in silence through the dense, trackless woods. He walked very rapidly, looking neither to the right nor to the left, finding his way apparently by an intuitive sense of direction. Occasionally he glanced back over his shoulder and smiled.

Walking through the woods here was not difficult, and the party made rapid progress. The huge, upstanding tree-trunks were devoid of limbs for a hundred feet or more above the ground. On some of them a luxuriant vine was growing—a vine that bore a profusion of little gray berries. In the branches high overhead a few birds flew to and fro, calling out at times with a soft, cooing note. The ground—a gray, finely powdered sandy loam—was carpeted with bluish, fallen leaves, sometimes with a species of blue moss, and occasional ferns of a like color.

The forest was dense, deep, and silent; the tree branches overhead locked together in a solid canopy, shutting out the black sky above. Yet even in this seclusion the scene remained as light as it had been outside the woods in the open. Darkness indeed was impossible in this land; under all circumstances the light seemed the same—neither too bright nor too dim—a comfortable, steady glow, restful, almost hypnotic in its sameness.

They had traveled perhaps six miles from the point where they met their Oroid guide when suddenly the Very Young Man

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became aware that other Oroids were with them. Looking to one side, he saw two more of these strange gray men, silently stalking along, keeping pace with them. Turning, he made out still another, following a short distance behind. The Very Young Man was startled, and hurriedly pointed them out to his companions.

"Wait," called the Doctor to their youthful guide, and abruptly the party came to a halt.

By signs they made their guide understand that they wanted these other men to come closer. The Oroid shouted to them in his own quaint tongue, words of a soft, liquid quality with a wistful sound—words wholly unintelligible to the adventurers.

The men came forward diffidently, six of them, for three others appeared out of the shadows of the forest, and stood in a group, talking among themselves a little and smiling at their visitors. They were all dressed similarly to Lao—for such was the young Oroid's name—and all of them older than he, and of nearly the same height.

"Do any of you speak English?" asked the Doctor, addressing them directly.

Evidently they did not, for they answered only by shaking their heads and by more smiles.

Then one of them spoke. "The Master welcomes his friends," he said. And all the others repeated it after him, like children in school repeating proudly a lesson newly learned.

The Doctor and his two friends laughed heartily, and, completely reassured by this exhibition of their friendliness, they signified to Lao that they were again ready to go forward.

As they walked onward through the apparently endless and unchanging forest, surrounded by what the Very Young Man called their "guard of honor," they were joined from time to time by other Oroid men, all of whom seemed to know who they were and where they were going, and who fell silently into line with them. Within an hour their party numbered twenty or more.

Seeing one of the natives stop a moment and snatch some berries from one of the vines with which many of the trees were encumbered, the Very Young Man did the same. He found the berries sweet and palatable, and he ate a quantity. Then, discovering he was hungry, he took some crackers from his belt and ate them walking along. The Doctor and the Big Business Man ate also, for although they had not realized it, all three were actually famished.

Shortly after this the party came to a broad, smooth-flowing river, its banks lined with rushes, with here and there a little spot of gray, sandy beach. It was apparent from Lao's signs that they must wait at this point for a boat to take them across. This they were glad enough to do, for all three had gone nearly to the limit of their strength. They drank deep of the pure river water, laved their aching limbs in it gratefully, and lay down, caring not a bit how long they were forced to wait.

In perhaps another hour the boat appeared. It came from down the river, propelled close inshore by two members of their own party who had gone to fetch it. At first the travelers thought it a long, oblong raft. Then as it came closer they could see it was constructed of three canoes, each about thirty feet long, hollowed out of tree-trunks. Over these was laid a platform of small trees hewn roughly into boards. The boat was propelled by long, slender poles in the hands of the two men, who, one on each side, dug them into the bed of the river and walked with them the length of the platform.

Onto this boat the entire party crowded, and they were soon well out on the shallow river, headed for its opposite bank. The Very Young Man, seated at the front end of the platform with his legs dangling over and his feet only a few inches above the silver phosphorescence of the rippling water underneath, sighed luxuriously.

"This beats anything we've done yet," he murmured. "Gee, it's nice here!"

WHEN they landed on the farther bank another group of natives were waiting for them. The party, thus strengthened to

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nearly forty, started off immediately into the forest, which on this side of the river appeared equally dense and trackless.

They appeared now to be paralleling the course of the river a few hundred yards back from its bank. After half an hour of this traveling they came abruptly to what at first appeared to be the mouth of a large cave, but which afterward proved to be a tunnel-like passageway. Into this opening the party unhesitatingly plunged.

Within this tunnel, which sloped downward at a considerable angle, they made even more rapid progress than in the forest above. The tunnel walls here were perhaps twenty feet apart—walls of a glistening, radiant, crystalline rock. The roof of the passageway was fully twice as high as its width; its rocky floor was smooth and even.

After a time this tunnel was crossed by another, somewhat broader and higher, but in general of similar aspect. It, too, sloped downward, more abruptly from the intersection. Into this latter passageway the party turned, still taking the downward course.

As they progressed, many other passageways were crossed, the intersections of which were wide at the open spaces. Occasionally the travelers encountered other natives, all of them men, most of whom turned and followed them.

The Big Business Man, after over an hour of this rapid walking was again near the limit of his endurance, when the party, after crossing a broad, open square, came upon a sort of sleigh, with two animals harnessed to it. It was standing at the intersection of a still broader, evidently more traveled passageway, and in it was an attendant, apparently fast asleep.

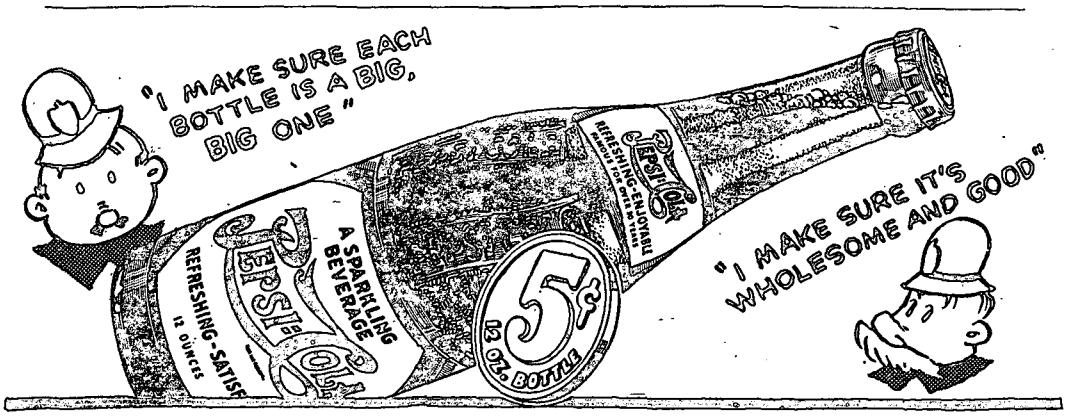
Into this sleigh climbed the three travelers with their guide, Lao; and, driven by the attendant, they started down the broader tunnel at a rapid pace. The sleigh was balanced upon a broad single runner of polished stone, with a narrow, slightly shorter outrider on each side; it slid smoothly and easily on this runner over the equally smooth metallic-rock of the ground.

The reindeerlike animals were harnessed by their heads to a single shaft. They were guided by a short, pointed pole in the hands of the driver, who, as occasion demanded, dug it vigorously into their flanks.

In this manner the travelers rode perhaps half an hour more. The passageway sloped steeply downward, and they made good speed. Finally without warning, except by a sudden freshening of the air, they emerged into the open, and found themselves facing a broad, rolling stretch of country, dotted here and there with trees —the country of the Oroids at last.

For the first time since leaving their own world the adventurers found themselves amid surroundings that at least held some semblance of an aspect of familiarity. The scene they faced now might have been one of their own land viewed on an abnormally bright though moonless evening.

For some miles they could see a rolling, open country, curving slightly upward into



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the dimness of the distance. At their right, close by, lay a broad lake, its surface wrinkled under a gentle breeze and gleaming bright as a great sheet of polished silver.

Overhead hung a gray-blue, cloudless sky, studded with a myriad of faint, twinkling, golden-silver stars. On the lake shore lay a collection of houses, close together at the water's edge and spreading back thinly into the hills behind. This they knew to be Arite—the city of their destination.

At the end of the tunnel they left the sleigh, and, turning down the gentle sloping hillside, leisurely approached the city. They were part way across an open field separating them from the nearest houses, when they saw a group of figures coming across the field toward them. This group stopped when still a few hundred yards away, only two of the figures continuing to come forward. They came onward steadily, the tall figure of a man clothed in white, and by his side a slender, graceful boy.

In a moment more Lao, walking in front of the Doctor and his two companions, stopped suddenly and, turning to face them, said quietly, "The Master."

The three travelers, with their hearts pounding, paused an instant. Then with a shout the Very Young Man dashed forward, followed by his two companions.

"It's Rogers—it's Rogers!" he called; and in a moment more the three men were beside the Chemist, shaking his hand and pouring at him excitedly their words of greeting.

The Chemist welcomed them heartily, but with a quiet, curious air of dignity that they did not remember he possessed before. He seemed to have aged considerably since they had last seen him. The lines in his face had deepened; the hair on his temples was white. He seemed also to be rather taller than they remembered him, and certainly he was stouter.

He was dressed in a long, flowing robe of white cloth, gathered in at the waist by a girdle, from which hung a short sword, apparently of gold or of beaten brass. His legs were bare; on his feet he wore a form of sandal with leather thongs crossing his insteps. His hair grew long over his ears and was cut off at the shoulder-line in the fashion of the natives.

When the first words of greeting were over, the Chemist turned to the boy, who was standing apart, watching them with big, interested eyes.

"My friends," he said quietly, yet with a little underlying note of pride in his voice, "this is my son."

The boy approached deferentially. He was apparently about ten or eleven years of age, tall as his father's shoulder nearly, extremely slight of build, yet with a body perfectly proportioned. He was dressed in a white robe similar to his father's, only shorter, ending at his knees. His skin was of a curious, smooth, milky whiteness, lacking the gray harder look of that of the native men, and with just a touch of the iridescent quality possessed by the women. His features were cast in a delicate mold, pretty enough almost to be called girlish, yet with a firm squareness of chin distinctly masculine.

His eyes were blue; his thick, wavy hair, falling to his shoulders, was a chestnut brown. His demeanor was graceful and dignified, yet with a touch of ingenuousness that marked him for the care-free child he really was. He held out his hands palms up as he approached.

"My name is Loto," he said in a sweet, soft voice, with perfect self-possession. "I'm glad to meet my father's friends." He spoke English with just a trace of the liquid quality that characterized his mother's tongue.

"You are late getting here," remarked the Chemist with a smile, as the three travelers, completely surprised by this sudden introduction, gravely shook hands with the boy.

During this time the young Oroid who had guided them down from the forest above the tunnels, had been standing respectfully behind them, a few feet away. A short distance farther on several small groups of natives were gathered, watching the strangers. With a few swift words Loto

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now dismissed their guide, who bowed low with his hands to his forehead and left them.

Led by the Chemist, they continued on down into the city, talking earnestly, telling him the details of their trip. The natives followed them as they moved forward, and as they entered the city others looked at them curiously and, the Very Young Man thought, with a little hostility, yet always from a respectful distance. Evidently it was night, or at least the time of sleep at this hour, for the streets they passed through were nearly deserted.

CHAPTER XI

THE CITY OF ARITE

THE city of Arite, as it looked to them now, was strange beyond anything they had ever seen, but still by no means as extraordinary as they had expected it would be. The streets through which they walked were broad and straight, and were crossed by others at regular intervals of two or three hundred feet. These streets paralleled each other with mathematical regularity. The city thus was laid out most orderly, but with one peculiarity; the streets did not run in two directions crossing each other at right angles, but in three, each inclined to an equal degree with the others. The blocks of houses between them, therefore, were cut into diamond-shaped sections and into triangles, never into squares or oblongs.

Most of the streets seemed paved with large, flat gray blocks of a substance resembling highly polished stone, or a form of opaque glass. There were no sidewalks, but close up before the more pretentious of the houses, small trees were growing.

The houses themselves were generally triangular or diamond-shaped, following the slope of the streets. They were, most of them, but two stories in height, with flat roofs on some of which flowers and trellised vines were growing. They were built principally of the same smooth, gray blocks with which the streets were paved. Their windows were large and numerous, without window-panes, but closed now, nearly all of them by shining, silvery curtains that looked as though they might have been woven from the metal itself. The doors were of heavy metal, suggesting brass or gold. On some of the houses tiny low-railed balconies hung from the upper windows out over the street.

The party proceeded quietly through this now deserted city, crossing a large tree-lined square, or park, that by the confluence of many streets seemed to mark its center, and turned finally into another diagonal street that dropped swiftly down toward the lake front. At the edge of a promontory this street abruptly terminated in a broad flight of steps leading down to a little beach on the lake shore perhaps a hundred feet below.

The Chemist turned sharp to the right at the head of these steps, and, passing through the opened gateway of an arch in a low gray wall, led his friends into a garden in which were growing a profusion of flowers. These flowers, they noticed, were most of them blue or gray, or of a pale silvery whiteness, lending to the scene a peculiarly wan, wistful appearance, yet one of extraordinary, quite unearthly beauty.

Through the garden a little gray-pebbled path wound back to where a house stood, nearly hidden in a grove of trees, upon a bluff directly overlooking the lake.

"My home, gentlemen," said the Chemist, with a wave of his hand.

As they approached the house they heard, coming from within, the mellow voice of a woman singing—an odd little minor theme, with a quaint, lilting rhythm, and words they could not distinguish. Accompanying the voice were the delicate tones of some stringed instrument suggesting a harp.

"We are expected," remarked the Chemist with a smile. "Lylda is still up, waiting for us." The Very Young Man's heart gave a leap at the mention of the name.

From the outside, the Chemist's house resembled many of the larger ones they had seen as they came through the city. It was considerably more pretentious than any

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they had yet noticed, diamond-shaped—that is to say, a flattened oblong—two stories in height and built of large blocks of the gray polished stone.

Unlike the other houses, its sides were not bare, but were partly covered by a luxuriant growth of vines and trellised flowers. There were no balconies under its windows, except on the lake side. There, at the height of the second story, a covered balcony broad enough almost to be called a veranda, stretched the full width of the house.

A broad door of brass, fronting the garden, stood partly open, and the Chemist pushed it wide and ushered in his friends. They found themselves now in a triangular hallway, or lobby, with an open arch in both its other sides giving passage into rooms beyond. Through one of these archways the Chemist led them, into what evidently was the main living-room of the dwelling.

It was a high-ceilinged room nearly triangular in shape, thirty feet possibly at its greatest width. In one wall were several silvery-curtained windows, opening out onto the lake. On the other side was a broad fireplace and hearth, with another archway beside it leading farther into the house. The walls of the room were lined with small gray tiles; the floor also was tiled with gray and white, set in design.

On the floor were spread several large rugs, apparently made of grass or fiber. The walls were bare, except between the windows, where two long, narrow, heavily embroidered strips of golden cloth were hanging.

In the center of the room stood a circular stone table, its top a highly polished black slab of stone. This table was set now for a meal, with golden metal dishes, huge metal goblets of a like color, and beautifully wrought table utensils, also of gold. Around the table were several small chairs, made of wicker. In the seat of each lay a padded fiber cushion, and over the back was hung a small piece of embroidered cloth.

With the exception of these chairs and table, the room was practically devoid of furniture. Against one wall was a smaller table of stone, with a few miscellaneous objects on its top, and under each window stood a small white stone bench.

A fire glowed in the fireplace grate—a fire that burned without flame. On the hearth before it, reclining on large silvery cushions, was a woman holding in her hands a small stringed instrument like a tiny harp or lyre. When the men entered the room she laid her instrument aside and rose to her feet.

AS THE woman stood there for an instant, expectant, with the light of welcome in her eyes, the three strangers beheld what to them seemed the most perfect vision of feminine loveliness they had ever seen.

Her age was at first glance indeterminate. By her face, her long, slender, yet well-rounded neck, and the slim curves of her girlish figure, she might have been hardly more than twenty. Yet in her bearing there was that indefinable poise and dignity that bespoke the more mature, older woman.

She was about five feet tall, with a slender, almost fragile, yet perfectly rounded body. Her dress consisted of a single flowing garment of light-blue silk, reaching from the shoulders to just above her knees. It was girdled at the waist by a thick golden cord that hung with golden tasseled pendants at her side.

A narrower golden cord crossed her breast and shoulders. Her arms, legs, and shoulders were bare. Her skin was smooth as satin, milky white and suffused with the delicate tints of many colors. Her hair was thick and very black; it was twisted into two tresses that fell forward over each shoulder nearly to her waist and ended with a little silver ribbon and tassel.

Her face was a delicate oval. Her lips were full and of a color for which in English there is no name. It would have been red doubtless by sunlight in the world above, but here in this silver light of phosphorescence, the color red, as we see it, was impossible.

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Her nose was small, of Grecian type. Her slate-gray eyes were rather large, very slightly upturned at the corners, giving just a touch of the look of our women of the Orient. Her lashes were long and very black. In conversation she lowered them at times with a charming combination of feminine humility and a touch of coquetry. Her gaze from under them had often a peculiar look of melting softness, yet always it was direct and honest.

Such was the woman who quietly stood beside her hearth, waiting to welcome these strange guests from another world.

As the men entered through the archway, the boy Loto pushed quickly past them in his eagerness to get ahead, and, rushing across the room, threw himself into the woman's arms crying happily, *"Mita, mita."*

The woman kissed him affectionately. Then, before she had time to speak, the boy pulled her forward, holding her tightly by one hand.

"This is my mother," he said with a pretty little gesture. "Her name is Lylda."

The woman loosened herself from his grasp with a smile of amusement, and native fashion, bowed low with her hands to her forehead.

"My husband's friends are welcome," she said simply. Her voice was soft and musical. She spoke English perfectly, with an intonation of which the most cultured woman might be proud, but with a foreign accent much more noticeable than that of her son.

"A very long time we have been waiting for you," she added; and then, as an afterthought, she impulsively offered them her hand in their own manner.

The Chemist kissed his wife quietly. In spite of the presence of strangers, for a moment she dropped her reserve, her arms went up around his neck, and she clung to him an instant. Gently putting her down, the Chemist turned to his friends.

"I think Lylda has supper waiting," he said. Then, as he looked at their torn, woolen suits that once were white, and the ragged shoes upon their feet, he added with a smile, "But I think I can make you much more comfortable first."

He led them up a broad, curving flight of stone steps to a room above, where they found a shallow pool of water, sunk below the level of the floor. Here he left them to bathe, getting them meanwhile robes similar to his own, with which to replace their own soiled garments. In a little while, much refreshed, they descended to the room below, where Lylda had supper ready upon the table waiting for them.

"Only a little while ago my father and Aura left," said Lylda, as they sat down to eat.

"Lylda's younger sister," the Chemist explained. "She lives with her father here in Arite."

The Very Young Man parted his lips to speak. Then, with heightened color in his cheeks, he closed them again.

They were deftly served at supper by a little native girl who was dressed in a short tunic reaching from waist to knees, with circular disks of gold covering her breasts. There was cooked meat for the meal, a white, starchy form of vegetable somewhat resembling a potato, a number of delicious fruits of unfamiliar variety, and for drink the juice of a fruit that tasted more like cider than anything they could name.

At the table Loto perched himself beside the Very Young Man, for whom he seemed to have taken a sudden fancy.

"I like you," he said suddenly, during a lull in the talk.

"I like you, too," answered the Very Young Man.

"Aura is very beautiful; you'll like her."

"I'm sure I will," the Very Young Man agreed soberly.

"What's your name?" persisted the boy.

"My name's Jack. And I'm glad you like me. I think we're friends, don't you?"

And so they became firm friends, and, as far as circumstances would permit, inseparable companions.

Lylda presided over the supper with the charming grace of a competent hostess. She spoke seldom, yet when the conversation turned to the great world above in which

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her husband was born, she questioned intelligently and with eager interest. Evidently she had a considerable knowledge of the subject, but with an almost childish insatiable curiosity she sought from her guests more intimate details of the world they lived in.

When in lighter vein their talk ran into comments upon the social life of their own world, Lylda's ready wit, combined with her ingenuous simplicity, put to them many questions which made the giving of an understandable answer sometimes amusingly difficult.

When the meal was over the three travelers found themselves very sleepy, and all of them were glad when the Chemist suggested that they retire almost immediately. He led them again to the upper story into the bedroom they were to occupy. There, on the low bedsteads, soft with many quilted coverings, they passed the remainder of the time of sleep in dreamless slumber, utterly worn out by their journey nor guessing what the morning would bring forth.

CHAPTER XII

THE WORLD OF THE RING

NEXT morning after breakfast the four men sat upon the balcony overlooking the lake, and prepared to hear the Chemist's narrative of what had happened since he left them five years before. They had already told him of events in their world, the making of the chemicals and their journey down into the ring, and now they were ready to hear his story.

At their ease here upon the balcony, reclining in long wicker chairs of the Chemist's own design, as he proudly admitted, they felt at peace with themselves and the world. Below them lay the shining lake, above spread a clear, star-studded sky. Against their faces blew the cool breath of a gentle summer's breeze.

As they sat silent for a moment, enjoying almost with awe the beauties of the scene, and listening to the soft voice of Lylda singing to herself in the garden, the Very Young Man suddenly thought of the one thing lacking to make his enjoyment perfect.

"I wish I had a cigarette," he remarked wistfully.

The Chemist with a smile produced cigars or a leaf that proved a very good substitute for tobacco. They lighted them with a tiny metal lighter of the flint and steel variety, filled with a fluffy inflammable wick—a contrivance of the Chemist's own making—and then he started his narrative.

"There is much to tell you, my friends," he began thoughtfully. "Much that will interest you, shall we say from a socialistic standpoint? I shall make it brief, for we have no time to sit idly talking.

"I must tell you now, gentlemen, of what I think you have so far not even had a hint. You have found me living here," he hesitated and smiled, "well at least under pleasant and happy circumstances. Yet as a matter of fact, your coming was of vital importance, not only to me and my family, but probably to the future welfare of the entire Oroid nation.

"We are approaching a crisis here with which I must confess I have felt myself unable to cope. With your help, more especially with the power of the chemicals you have brought with you, it may be possible for us to deal successfully with the conditions facing us."

"What are they?" asked the Very Young Man eagerly.

"Perhaps it would be better for me to tell you chronologically the events as they have occurred. As you remember when I left you twelve years ago—"

"Five years," interrupted the Very Young Man.

"Five or twelve, as you please," said the Chemist, smiling. "It was my intention then, as you know, to come back to you after a comparatively short stay here."

"And bring Mrs.—er—Lylda, with you," put in the Very Young Man, hesitating in confusion over the Christian name.

"And bring Lylda with me," finished the Chemist. "I got back here without much

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difficulty, and in a very much shorter time and with less effort than on my first trip. I tried an entirely different method; I stayed as large as possible while descending, and diminished my size materially only after I had reached the bottom."

"I told you—" said the Big Business Man.

"It was a dangerous method of procedure, but I made it successfully without mishap.

"Lylda and I were married in native fashion shortly after I reached Arite."

"How was that; what fashion?" the Very Young Man wanted to know, but the Chemist went on.

"It was my intention to stay here only a few weeks and then return with Lylda. She was willing to follow me anywhere I might take her, because—well, perhaps you would hardly understand, but—women here are different in many ways than you know them.

"I stayed several months, still planning to leave almost at any time. I found this world an intensely interesting study. Then, when—Loto was expected, I again postponed my departure.

"I had been here over a year before I finally gave up my intention of ever returning to you. I have no close relatives above, you know, no one who cares much for me or for whom I care, and my life seemed thoroughly established here.

"I am afraid, gentlemen, I am offering excuses for myself—for my desertion of my own country in its time of need. I have no defense. As events turned out I could not have helped probably, very much, but still—that is no excuse. I can only say that your world up there seemed so very, very far away. Events up there had become to me only vague memories as of a dream. And Lylda and my little son were so near, so real and vital to me. Well, at any rate I stayed, deciding definitely to make my home and to end my days here."

"What did you do about the drugs?" asked the Doctor.

"I kept them hidden carefully for nearly a year," the Chemist replied. "Then fearing lest they should in some way get loose, I destroyed them. They possess a diabolical power, gentlemen; I am afraid of it."

"They called you the Master," suggested the Very Young Man, after a pause. "Why was that?"

The Chemist smiled. "They do call me the Master. That has been for several years. I suppose I am the most important individual in the nation to-day."

"I should think you would be," said the Very Young Man quickly. "What you did; with the knowledge you have."

The Chemist went on. "Lylda and I lived with her father and Aura—her mother is dead, you know—until after Loto was born. Then we had a house further up in the city. Later, about eight years ago, I built this house we now occupy and Lylda laid out its garden which she is tremendously proud of, and which I think is the finest in Arite.

"Because of what I had done in the Malite war, I became naturally the King's adviser. Everyone felt me the saviour of the nation, which, in a way, I suppose I was. I never used the drugs again and, as only a very few of the people ever understood them or in fact, even knew of them or believed in their existence, my extraordinary change in stature was ascribed to some supernatural power. I have always since been credited with being able to exert that power at will, although I never used it but that once."

"You have it again now," said the Doctor smiling.

"Yes, I have, thank God," answered the Chemist fervently, "though I hope I never shall have to use it."

"Aren't you planning to go back with us," asked the Very Young Man, "even for a visit?"

The Chemist shook his head. "My way lies here," he said quietly, yet with deep feeling.

A SILENCE followed; finally the Chemist roused himself from his reverie, and went on. "Although I never again changed my stature, there were a thousand different ways in which I con-

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tinued to make myself—well, famous throughout the land. I have taught these people many things, gentlemen. Like this for instance." He indicated his cigar, and the chair in which he was sitting. "You cannot imagine what a variety of things one knows beyond the knowledge of so primitive a race as this.

"And so gradually, I became known as the Master. I have no official position, but everywhere I am known by that name. As a matter of fact, for the past year at least, it has been rather too descriptive a title." The Chemist smiled somewhat ruefully. "For I have had in reality, and have now, the destiny of the country on my shoulders."

"You're not threatened with another war?" asked the Very Young Man.

"No, not exactly that. But I had better go on with my story first. This is a very different world now, gentlemen, from that I first entered twelve years ago. I think first I should tell you about it as it was then."

His three friends nodded their agreement and the Chemist continued.

"I must make it clear to you gentlemen, the one great fundamental difference between this world and yours. In the evolution of this race there has been no cause for strife—the survival of the fittest always has been an unknown doctrine—a non-existent problem.

"In extent this Inner Surface upon which we are now living is nearly as great as the surface of your own earth. From the earliest known times it has been endowed with a perfect climate—a climate such as you are now enjoying."

The Very Young Man expanded his chest and looked his appreciation.

"The climate, the rainfall, everything, is ideal for crops and for living conditions. In the matter of food, one needs in fact do practically nothing. Fruits of a variety ample to sustain life, grow wild in abundance. Vegetables planted are harvested seemingly without blight or hazard of any kind. No destructive insects have ever impeded agriculture; no wild animals have ever existed to harass humanity. Nature in fact, offers every help and no obstacle toward making a simple, primitive life easy to live.

"Under such conditions the race developed only so far as was necessary to insure a healthful pleasant existence. Civilization here is what you would call primitive; wants are few and easily supplied—too easily, probably, for without strife these people have become—well, shall I say effeminate? They are not exactly that—it is not a good word."

"I should think that such an unchanging, unrigorous climate would make a race deteriorate in physique rapidly," observed the Doctor.

"How about disease down here?" asked the Big Business Man.

"It is a curious thing," replied the Chemist. "Cleanliness seems to be a trait inborn with every individual in this race. It is more than godliness; it is the one great cardinal virtue. You must have noticed it, just in coming through Arite. Personal cleanliness of the people, and cleanliness of houses, streets—of everything. It is truly extraordinary to what extent they go to make everything inordinately, immaculately clean. Possibly for that reason, and because there seem never to have been any serious disease germs existing here, sickness as you know it, does not exist."

"Guess you better not go into business here," said the Very Young Man with a grin at the Doctor.

"There is practically no illness worthy of the name," went on the Chemist. "The people live out their lives and, barring accident, die peacefully of old age."

"How old do they live to be?" asked the Big Business Man.

"About the same as with you," answered the Chemist. "Only of course as we measure time."

"Say, how about that?" the Very Young Man asked. "My watch is still going. Is it ticking off the old time or the new time down here?"

"I should say probably—certainly—it

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was giving time of your own world, just as it always did," the Chemist replied.

"Well, there's no way of telling, is there?" said the Big Business Man.

"What is the exact difference in time?" the Doctor asked.

"That is something I have had no means of determining. It was rather a curious thing; when I left that letter for you"—the Chemist turned to the Doctor—"it never occurred to me that although I had told you to start down here on a certain day, I would be quite at a loss to calculate when that day had arrived. It was my estimation after my first trip here that time in this world passed at a rate about two and two-fifths times faster than it does in your world. That is as near as I ever came to it. We can calculate it more closely now, since we have only the interval of your journey down as an indeterminate quantity."

"HOW near right did you hit it? When did you expect us?" asked the Doctor.

"About thirty days ago; I have been waiting since then. I sent nearly a hundred men through the tunnels into the forest to guide you in."

"You taught them pretty good English," said the Very Young Man. "They were tickled to death that they knew it, too," he added with a reminiscent grin.

"You say about thirty days; how do you measure time down here?" asked the Big Business Man.

"I call a day, one complete cycle of sleeping and eating," the Chemist replied. "I suppose that is the best translation of the Oroid word; we have a word that means about the same thing."

"How long is a day?" inquired the Very Young Man.

"It seems in the living about the same as your twenty-four hours; it occupies probably about the interval of time of ten hours in your world.

"You see," the Chemist went on, "we ordinarily eat twice between each time of sleep—once after rising, and once a few hours before bedtime. Workers at severe muscular labor sometimes eat a light meal in between, but the custom is not general. Time is generally spoken of as so many meals, rather than days."

"But what is the arbitrary standard?" asked the Doctor. "Do you have an equivalent for weeks, or months or years?"

"Yes," answered the Chemist, "based on astronomy the same as in your world. But I would rather not explain that now. I want to take you, later to-day, to see Lylda's father. You will like him. He is—well, what we might call a scientist. He talks English fairly well. We can discuss astronomy with him; you will find him very interesting."

"How can you tell time?" the Very Young Man wanted to know. "There is no sun to go by. You have no clocks, have you?"

"There is one down-stairs," answered the Chemist, "but you didn't notice it. Lylda's father has a very fine one; he will show it to you."

"It seems to me," began the Doctor thoughtfully after a pause, reverting to their previous topic, "that without sickness, under such ideal living conditions as you say exist here, in a very short time this world would be over-populated."

"Nature seems to have taken care of that," the Chemist answered, "and as a matter of fact quite the reverse is true. Women mature in life at an age you would call about sixteen. But early marriages are not the rule; seldom is a woman married before she is twenty—frequently she is much older. Her period of child-bearing, too, is comparatively short—frequently less than ten years. The result is few children, whose rate of mortality is exceedingly low."

"How about the marriages?" the Very Young Man suggested. "You were going to tell us."

"Marriages are by mutual consent," answered the Chemist, "solemnized by a simple, social ceremony. They are for a stated period of time, and are renewed later if both parties desire. When a mar-

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riage is dissolved children are cared for by the mother generally, and her maintainance, if necessary, is provided for by the Government. The state becomes the guardian, also of all illegitimate children and children of unknown parentage. But of both these classes there are very few. They work for the government as do many other people, until they are of age, when they become free to act as they please."

"You spoke about women being different than we knew them; how are they different?" the Very Young Man asked. "If they're all like Lylda I think they're great," he added enthusiastically, flushing a little at his own temerity.

The Chemist smiled his acknowledgment of the compliment. "The status of women —and their character—is I think one of the most remarkable things about this race. You will remember, when I returned from here the first time, that I was much impressed by the kindliness of these people. Because of their history, and their environment, they seem to have become imbued with the milk of human kindness to a degree approaching the Utopian.

"Crime here is a practical non-existent; there is nothing over which contention can arise. What crimes are committed are punished with a severity seemingly out of all proportion to what you would call justice. A persistent offender even of fairly trivial wrong-doing is put to death without compunction. There is no imprisonment, except for those awaiting trial. Punishment is a reprimand with the threat of death if the offense is committed again, or death itself immediately. Probably this very severity and the swiftness with which punishment is meted out, to a large extent discourages wrong-doing. But, fundamentally, the capacity for doing wrong is lacking in these people.

"I have said practically nothing exists over which contention can arise. That is not strictly true. No race of people can develop without some individual contention over the possession of their women. The passions of love, hate and jealousy, centering around sex and its problems, are as necessarily present in human beings as life itself.

"Love here is deep, strong and generally lasting—it lacks fire, intensity—perhaps. I should say it is rather of a placid quality. Hatred seldom exists; jealousy is rare, because both sexes, in their actions toward the other are guided by a spirit of honesty and fairness that is really extraordinary. This is true particularly of the women; they are absolutely honest—square, through and through.

"Crimes against women are few, yet in general they are the most prevalent type we have. They are punishable by death—even those that you would characterize as comparatively slight offenses. It is significant too that, in judging these crimes, but little evidence is required. A slight chain of proven circumstances and the word of the woman is all that is required.

"This, you will say, places a tremendous power in the hands of women. It does; yet they realize it thoroughly, and justify it. Although they know that almost at their word a man will be put to death, practically never, I am convinced is this power abused. With extreme infrequency, a female is proven guilty of lying. The penalty is death, for there is no place here for such a woman!

"The result is that women are accorded a freedom of movement far beyond anything possible in your world. They are safe from harm. Their morals are, according to the standard here, practically one hundred per cent perfect. With short term marriages, dissolvable at will, there is no reason why they should be otherwise. Curiously enough, too, marriages are renewed frequently—more than that, I should say, generally—for life-long periods. Polygamy with the consent of all parties is permitted, but seldom practiced. Polyandry is unlawful, and but few cases of it ever appear.

"You may think all this a curious system, gentlemen, but it works."

"That's the answer," muttered the Very Young Man. It was obvious he was still thinking of Lylda and her sister and with a heightened admiration and respect.

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CHAPTER XIII

A LIFE WORTH LIVING

THE appearance of Lylda at one of the long windows of the balcony, interrupted the men for a moment. She was dressed in a tunic of silver, of curious texture, like flexible woven metal, reaching to her knees. On her feet were little fibre sandals. Her hair was twisted in coils, piled upon her head, with a knot low at the back of the neck. From her head in graceful folds hung a thin scarf of gold.

She stood waiting in the window a moment for them to notice her; then she said quietly: "I am going for a time to the—court." She hesitated an instant over the word. The Chemist inclined his head in agreement, and with a smile at her guests, and a little bow, she withdrew.

The visitors looked inquiringly at their host.

"I must tell you about our government," said the Chemist. "Lylda plays quite an important part in it." He smiled at their obvious surprise.

"The head of the government is the king. In reality he is more like the president of a republic; he is chosen by the people to serve for a period of about twenty years. The present king is now in—well, let us say about the fifteenth year of his service. This translation of time periods into English is confusing," he interjected somewhat apologetically. "We shall see the king tomorrow; you will find him a most intelligent, likeable man.

"As a sort of congress, the king has one hundred and fifty advisers, half of them women, who meet about once a month. Lylda is one of these women. He also has an inner circle of closer, more intimate counsellors consisting of four men and four women. One of these women is the queen; another is Lylda. I am one of the men.

"The capital of the nation is Arite. Each of the other cities governs itself in so far as its own local problems are concerned according to a somewhat similar system, but all are under the central control of the Arite government."

"How about the country in between, the —the rural population?" asked the Big Business Man.

"It is all apportioned off to the nearest city," answered the Chemist. "Each city controls a certain amount of the land around it.

"This congress of one hundred and fifty is the lawmaking body. The judiciary is composed of one court in each city. There is a leader of the court, or judge, and a jury of forty—twenty men and twenty women. The juries are chosen for continuous service for a period of five years. Lylda is at present serving in the Arite Court. They meet very infrequently and irregularly, called as occasion demands. A two-thirds vote is necessary for a decision; there is no appeal!"

"Are there any lawyers?" asked the Big Business Man.

"There is no one who makes that his profession, no. Generally the accused talks for himself or has some relative, or possibly some friend to plead his case."

"You have police?" the Doctor asked.

"A very efficient police force, both for the cities and in the country. Really they are more like detectives than police; they are the men I sent up into the forest to meet you. We also have an army, which at present consists almost entirely of the same police force. After the Malite war it was of course very much disbanded—almost completely.

"How about money?" the Very Young Man wanted to know.

"There is none!" answered the Chemist with a smile.

"Great Scott, how can you manage that?" ejaculated the Big Business Man.

"Our industrial system undoubtedly is peculiar," the Chemist replied, "but I can only say again, it works. We have no money and, so far, none apparently is needed. Everything is bought and sold as an exchange. For instance, suppose I wish to make a living as a farmer. I have my land—"

"How did you get it?" interrupted the Very Young Man quickly.

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"All the land is divided up pro rata and given by each city to its citizens. At the death of its owner it reverts to the government, and each citizen coming of age receives his share from the surplus always remaining."

"What about women? Can they own land, too?" asked the Very Young Man.

"They have identical rights with men in everything," the Chemist answered.

"But women surely cannot cultivate their own land?" the Doctor said. Evidently he was thinking of Lylda's fragile little body, and certainly if most of the Oroid women were like her, labor in the fields would be for them quite impossible.

"A few women, by choice, do some of the lighter forms of manual labor—but they are very few. Nearly every woman marries, within a few years after she receives her land; if it is to be cultivated, her husband then takes charge of it."

"Is the cultivation of land compulsory?" asked the Big Business Man.

"Only when in a city's district a shortage of food is threatened. Then the government decides the amount and kind of food needed, and the citizens, drawn by lot, are ordered to produce it. The government watches very carefully its food supply. In the case of overproduction, certain citizens, those less skilled, are ordered to work at something else.

"This supervision over supply and demand is exercised by the government not only in the question of food but in manufactures, in fact, in all industrial activities. A very nice balance is obtained, so that practically no unnecessary work is done throughout the nation.

"And gentlemen, do you know, as a matter of fact, I think that is the secret of a race of people being able to live without having to work most of its waking hours? If your civilization could eliminate all its unnecessary work, there would be far less work to do."

"I wonder—isn't this balance of supply and demand very difficult to maintain?" asked the Big Business Man thoughtfully.

"Not nearly so difficult as you would think," the Chemist answered. "In the case of land cultivation, the government has a large reserve, the cultivation of which it adjusts to maintain this balance. Thus, in some districts, the citizens do as they please and are never interfered with.

"THE same is true of manufactures. There is no organized business in the nation—not even so much as the smallest factory—except that conducted by the government. Each city has its own factories, whose production is carefully planned exactly to equal the demand."

"Suppose a woman marries and her land is far away from her husband's? That would be sort of awkward, wouldn't it?" suggested the Very Young Man.

"Each year at a stated time," the Chemist answered, "transfers of land are made. There are generally enough people who want to move to make satisfactory changes of location practical. And then of course, the government always stands ready to take up any two widely separated pieces of land, and give others in exchange out of its reserve."

"Suppose you don't like the new land as well?" objected the Very Young Man.

"Almost all land is of equal value," answered the Chemist. "And of course, its state of cultivation is always considered."

"You were speaking about not having money," prompted the Very Young Man.

"The idea is simply this: Suppose I wish to cultivate nothing except, let us say, certain vegetables. I register with the government my intention and the extent to which I propose to go. I receive the government's consent. I then take my crops as I harvest them and exchange them for every other article I need."

"With whom do you exchange them?" asked the Doctor.

"Anyone I please—or with the government. Ninety per cent of everything produced is turned in to the government and other articles are taken from its stores."

"How is the rate of exchange established?" asked the Big Business Man.

"It is computed by the government.

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Private exchanges are supposed to be made at the same rate. It is against the law to cut under the government rate. But it is done, although apparently not with sufficient frequency to cause any trouble."

"I should think it would be tremendously complicated and annoying to make all these exchanges," said the Big Business Man.

"Not at all," answered the Chemist, "because of the governmental system of credits. The financial standing of every individual is carefully kept on record."

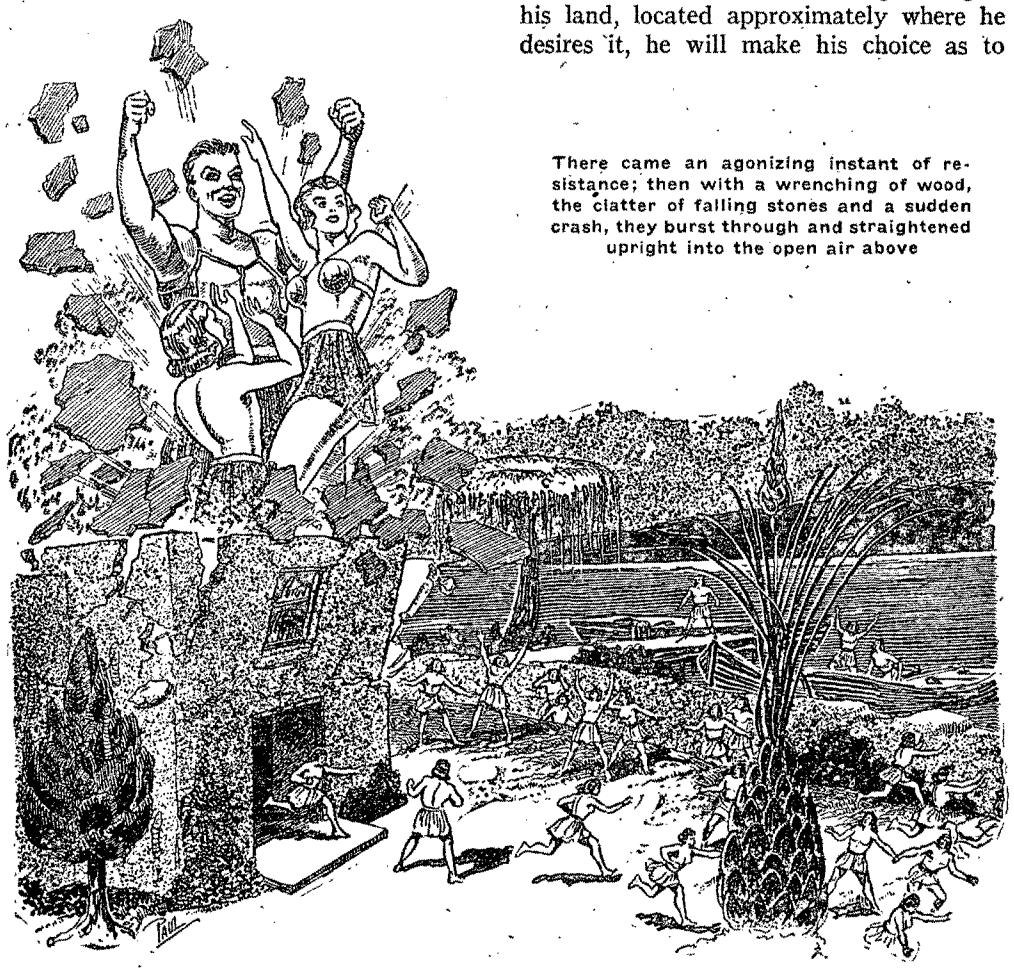
"Without any money? I don't get you," said the Very Young Man with a frown of bewilderment.

The Chemist smiled. "Well, I don't blame you for that. But I think I can make myself clear. Let us take the case of Loto, for instance, as an individual. When he comes of age he will be allotted his section of land. We will assume him to be without family at that time, entirely dependent on his own resources."

"Would he never have worked before coming of age?" the Very Young Man asked.

"Children with parents generally devote their entire minority to getting an education, and to building their bodies properly. Without parents, they are supported by the government and live in public homes. Such children, during their adolescence, work part time for the government.

"Now when Loto comes of age and gets his land, located approximately where he desires it, he will make his choice as to



There came an agonizing instant of resistance; then with a wrenching of wood, the clatter of falling stones and a sudden crash, they burst through and straightened upright into the open air above

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his vocation. Suppose he wishes not to cultivate his land but to work for the government. He is given some congenial, suitable employment at which he works approximately five hours a day. No matter what he elects to do, at the time he comes of age the government opens an account with him. He is credited with a certain standard unit for his work, which he takes from the government in supplies at his own convenience."

"What is the unit?" asked the Big Business Man.

"It is the average work produced by the average worker in one day—purely an arbitrary figure."

"Like our word horse-power?" put in the Doctor.

"Exactly. And all merchandise, food and labor is valued in terms of it.

"Thus you—every individual has his financial standing—all in relation to the government. He can let his balance pile up if he is able, or else he can keep it low."

"Suppose he goes into debt?" suggested the Very Young Man.

"In the case of obvious, verified necessity, the government will allow him a limited credit. Persistent—shall I say, willful?—debt is a crime."

"I thought at first," said the Big Business Man, "that everybody in this nation was on the same financial footing. That there was no premium put upon skill or industriousness. Now I see that one can accumulate, if not money, at least an inordinate amount of the world's good."

"Not such an inordinate amount," said the Chemist, smiling. "Because there is no inheritance. A man and woman, combining their worldly wealth, may by industry acquire more than others, but they are welcome to enjoy it. And they cannot, in one lifetime, get such a preponderance of wealth as to cause much envy from those lacking it."

"What happens to this house when you and Lylda die, if Loto cannot have it?" the Big Business Man asked.

"It is kept in repair by the government and held until some one with a sufficiently large balance wants to buy it."

"Are all workers paid at the same rate?" asked the Doctor.

"No, but their wages are much nearer equal than in your world."

"You have to hire people to work for you. How do you pay them?" the Doctor inquired.

"The rate is determined by governmental standard. I pay them by having the amount deducted from my balance and added to theirs."

"When you built this house, how did you go about doing it?" asked the Big Business Man.

"I simply went to the government, and they built it for me according to my own ideas and wishes, deducting its cost from my balance."

"What about the public work to be done?" asked the Big Business Man. "Caring for the city streets, the making of roads and all that. Do you have taxes?"

"No," answered the Chemist smiling, "we do not have taxes. Quite the reverse, we sometimes have dividends.

"THE government, you must understand, not only conducts a business account with each of its citizens, but one with itself also.

"The value of articles produced is computated with a profit allowance, so that by a successful business administration, the government is enabled not only to meet its public obligations, but to acquire a surplus to its own credit in the form of accumulated merchandise. This surplus is divided among the people every five years—a sort of dividend."

"I should think some cities might have much more than others," said the Big Business Man. "That would cause discontent, wouldn't it?"

"It would probably cause a rush of people to the more successful cities. But it doesn't happen, because each city reports to the national government and the whole thing is averaged up. You see it is all quite simple," the Chemist finished. "And it

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makes life here very easy to live, and very worth the living."

Unnoticed by the four interested men, a small compact-looking gray cloud had come sweeping down from the horizon above the lake and was scudding across the sky toward Arite. A sudden sharp crack of thunder interrupted their conversation.

"Hello, a storm!" exclaimed the Chemist, looking out over the lake. "You've never seen one, have you? Come upstairs."

They followed him into the house and upstairs to its flat roof. From this point of vantage they saw that the house was built with an interior courtyard or patio. Looking down into this courtyard from the roof they could see a little, splashing fountain in its centre, with flower beds, a narrow gray path, and several small white benches.

The roof, which was guarded with a breast-high parapet around both its inner and outer edges, was beautifully laid out with a variety of flowers and with trellised flower-bearing vines. In one corner were growing a number of small trees with great fan-shaped leaves of blue and bearing a large bell-shaped silver blossom.

One end of the roof on the lake side, was partially enclosed. Toward this roofed enclosure the Chemist led his friends. Within it a large fibre hammock hung between two stone posts. At one side a depression in the floor perhaps eight feet square was filled with what might have been blue pine needles, and a fluffy bluish moss. This rustic couch was covered at one end by a canopy of vines bearing a little white flower.

As they entered the enclosure, it began to rain, and the Chemist slid forward several panels, closing them in completely. There were shuttered windows in these walls, through which they could look at the scene outside—a scene that with the coming storm was weird and beautiful beyond anything they had ever beheld.

The cloud had spread sufficiently now to blot out the stars from nearly half of the sky. It was a thick cloud, absolutely opaque, and yet it caused no appreciable darkness, for the starlight it cut off was negligible and the silver radiation from the lake had more than doubled in intensity.

Under the strong wind that had sprung up the lake assumed now an extraordinary aspect. Its surface was raised into long, sweeping waves that curved sharply and broke upon themselves. In their tops the silver phosphorescence glowed and whirled until the whole surface of the lake seemed filled with a dancing white fire, twisting, turning and seeming to leap out of the water high into the air.

Several small sailboats, square, flat little catamarans, they looked, showed black against the water as they scudded for shore, trailing lines of silver out behind them.

The wind increased in force. Below, on the beach, a huge rock lay in the water, against which the surf was breaking. Columns of water at times shot into the air before the face of the rock, and were blown away by the wind in great clouds of glistening silver. Occasionally it thundered with a very sharp intense crack accompanied by a jagged bolt of bluish lightning that zigzagged down from the low-hanging cloud.

Then came the rain in earnest, a solid, heavy torrent, that bent down the wind and smoothed the surface of the lake. The rain fell almost vertically as though it were a tremendous curtain of silver strings. And each of these strings broke apart into great shining pearls as the eye followed downward the straight course of the raindrops.

For perhaps ten minutes the silver torrent poured down. Then suddenly it ceased. The wind had died away; in the air there was the fresh warm smell of wet and steaming earth. From the lake rolled up a shimmering translucent cloud of mist, like an enormous silver fire mounting into the sky. And then, as the gray cloud swept back behind them, beyond the city, and the stars gleamed overhead, they saw again that great trail of star-dust which the Chemist first had seen through his microscope, hanging in an ever broadening arc across the sky, and ending vaguely at their feet.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIAL

IN A FEW moments more the storm had passed completely; only the wet city streets, the mist over the lake, and the moist warmth of the air remained. For some time the three visitors to this extraordinary world stood silent at the latticed windows, awed by what they had seen. The noise of the panels as the Chemist slid them back brought them to themselves.

"A curious land, gentlemen," he remarked.

"It's—it's weird," the Very Young Man ejaculated.

The Chemist led them out across the roof to its other side facing the city. The street upon which the house stood sloped upward over the hill behind. It was set with the rain and gleamed like a sheet of burnished silver. And down its sides now ran two little streams of liquid silver fire.

The street, deserted during the storm, was beginning to fill again with people returning to their tasks. At this intersection with the next road above, they could see a line of sleighs passing. Beneath them, before the wall of the garden a little group of men stood talking; on a rooftop nearby a woman appeared with a tiny naked infant which she sat down to nurse in a corner of her garden.

"A city at work," said the Chemist with a wave of his hand. "Shall we go down and see it?"

His three friends assented readily, the Very Young Man suggesting promptly that they first visit Lylda's father and Aura.

"He is teaching Loto this morning," said the Chemist smiling.

"Why not go to the Court?" suggested the Big Business Man.

"Is the public admitted?" asked the Doctor.

"Nothing is secret here," the Chemist answered. "By all means, we will go to the Court first, if you wish; Lylda should be through very shortly."

The Court of Arite stood about a mile away near the lake shore. As they left the house and passed through the city streets the respect accorded the Chemist became increasingly apparent. The three strangers with him attracted considerable attention, for, although they wore the conventional robes in which the more prominent citizens were generally attired, their short hair and the pallid whiteness of their skin made them objects of curiosity. No crowd gathered; those they passed stared a little, raised their hands to their foreheads and went their way, yet underneath these signs of respect there was with some an air of sullenness, of hostility, that the visitors could not fail to notice.

The Oroid men, in street garb, were dressed generally in a short metallic-looking tunic of drab, with a brighter-colored girdle. The women, most of them, wore only a sort of skirt, reaching from waist to knees; a few had circular disks covering their breasts. There were hardly any children to be seen, except occasionally a little face staring curiously at them from a window, or peering down from a rooftop. Once or twice they passed a woman with an infant slung across her back in a sort of hammock.

The most common vehicle was a curious form of sleigh in which they had ridden down through the tunnels. They saw also a few little two-wheeled carts, with wheels that appeared to be a solid segment of tree-trunk. All the vehicles were drawn by meek-looking little gray animals like a small deer without horns.

The court-house of Arite, though a larger building, from the outside was hardly different than most others in the city. It was distinct however, in having on either side of the broad doorway that served as its main entrance, a large square stone column.

As they entered, passing a guard who saluted them respectfully, the visitors turned from a hallway and ascended a flight of steps. At the top they found themselves on a balcony overlooking the one large room that occupied almost the entire building. The balcony ran around all three sides (the room was triangular in shape) and was railed with a low stone parapet. On it

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were perhaps fifty people, sitting quietly on stone benches that lay close up behind the parapet. An attendant stood at each of the corners of the balcony; the one nearest bowed low as the Chemist and his companions entered silently and took their seats.

From the balcony the entire room below was in plain view. At the apex of its triangle sat the judge, on a raised dais of white stone with a golden canopy over it. He was a man about fifty—this leader of the court—garbed in a long loose robe of white. His hair, that fell to his shoulders, was snowy white, and around his forehead was a narrow white band. He held in his hand a sort of scepter of gold with a heavy golden cross at its end.

In six raised tiers of unequal length, like a triangular flight of stairs across the angle of the room, and directly in front of the judge, was the jury—twenty men and twenty women, seated in alternate rows. The men wore loose robes of gray; the women robes of blue. On a seat raised slightly above the others sat a man who evidently was speaker for the men of the jury. On a similarly elevated seat was the woman speaker; this latter was Lylda.

Near the centre of the room, facing the judge and jury were two triangular spaces about twenty feet across, enclosed with a breast-high wall of stone. Within each of their enclosures were perhaps ten or twelve people seated on small stone benches. Directly facing the members of the jury and between them and the two enclosures, was a small platform raised about four feet above the floor, with several steps leading up to it from behind.

A number of attendants dressed in the characteristic short tunics, with breast plates and a short sword hanging from the waist, stood near the enclosures, and along the sides of the room.

THE Chemist leaned over and whispered to his friends. "Those two enclosed places in the center are for the witnesses. Over there are those testifying for the accused; the others are witnesses for the government. The platform is where the accused stands when—"

He broke off suddenly. An expectant hush seemed to run over the room. A door at the side opened, and preceded and followed by two attendants a man entered, who walked slowly across the floor and stood alone upon the raised platform facing the jury.

He was a man of extraordinarily striking look and demeanor. He stood considerably over six feet in height, with a remarkably powerful yet lean body. He was naked except for a cloth breech clout girded about his loins. His appearance was not that of an Oroid, for besides his greater height, and more muscular physique, his skin was distinctly of a more brownish hue. His hair was cut at the base of the neck in Oroid fashion; it was black, with streaks of silver running through it. His features were large and cast in a rugged mold. His mouth was cruel, and wore now a sardonic smile. He stood erect with head thrown back and arms folded across his breast, calmly facing the men and women who were to judge him.

The Very Young Man gripped the Chemist by the arm. "Who is that?" he whispered.

The Chemist's lips were pressed together; he seemed deeply affected. "I did not know that they caught him," he answered softly. "It must have been just this morning."

The Very Young Man looked at Lylda. Her face was placid, but her breast was rising and falling more rapidly than normal, and her hands in her lap were tightly clenched.

The judge began speaking quietly, amid a deathlike silence. For over five minutes he spoke; once he was interrupted by a cheer, instantly stifled, and once by a murmur of dissent from several spectators on the balcony that called forth instant rebuke from the attendant stationed there.

The judge finished his speech, and raised his golden cross slowly before him. As his voice died away, Lylda rose to her feet and facing the judge bowed low, with hands

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to her forehead. Then she spoke a few words, evidently addressing the women before her. Each of them raised her hands and answered in a monosyllable, as though affirming an oath. This performance was repeated by the men.

The accused still stood silent, smiling sardonically. Suddenly his voice rasped out a short, ugly intonation and he threw his arms straight out before him. A murmur rose from the spectators, and several attendants leaned forward toward the platform. But the man only looked around at them contemptuously and again folded his arms.

From one of the enclosures a woman came, and mounted the platform beside the man. The Chemist whispered, "His wife; she is going to speak for him." But with a muttered exclamation and wave of his arm, the man swept her back, and without a word she descended the steps and re-entered the railed enclosure.

Then the man turned and raising his arms spoke angrily to those seated in the enclosure.

Then he appealed to the judge.

The Chemist whispered in explanation: "He refuses any witnesses."

At a sign from the judge the enclosure was opened and its occupants left the floor, most of them taking seats upon the balcony.

"Who is he?" the Very Young Man wanted to know, but the Chemist ignored his question.

For perhaps ten minutes the man spoke, obviously in his own defense. His voice was deep and powerful, yet he spoke now seemingly without anger; and without an air of pleading. In fact his whole attitude seemed one of irony and defiance. Abruptly he stopped speaking and silence again fell over the room. A man and a woman left the other enclosure and mounted the platform beside the accused. They seemed very small and fragile, as he towered over them, looking down at them sneeringly.

The man and woman conferred a moment in whispers. Then the woman spoke. She talked only a few minutes, interrupted twice by the judge, once by a question from Lylda, and once by the accused himself.

Then for perhaps ten minutes more her companion addressed the Court. He was a man considerably over middle age, and evidently, from his dress and bearing, a man of prominence in the nation. At one point in his speech it became obvious that his meaning was not clearly understood by the jury. Several of the women whispered together, and one rose and spoke to Lylda. She interrupted the witness with a quiet question. Later the accused himself questioned the speaker until silenced by the judge.

Following this witness came two others. Then the judge rose, and looking up to the balcony where the Chemist and his companions were sitting, motioned to the Chemist to descend to the floor below.

The Very Young Man tried once again with his whispered question, "What is it?" but the Chemist only smiled, and rising quietly left them.

THERE was a stir in the court-room as the Chemist crossed the main floor. He did not ascend the platform with the prisoner, but stood beside it. He spoke to the jury quietly, yet with a suppressed power in his voice that must have been convincing. He spoke only a moment, more with the impartial attitude of one who gives advice than as a witness. When he finished, he bowed to the Court and left the floor, returning at once to his friends upon the balcony.

Following the Chemist, after a moment of silence, the judge briefly addressed the prisoner, who stolidly maintained his attitude of ironic defiance.

"He is going to ask the jury to give its verdict now," said the Chemist in a low voice.

Lylda and her companion leader rose and faced their subordinates, and with a verbal monosyllable from each member of the jury the verdict was unhesitatingly given. As the last juryman's voice died away, there came a cry from the back of the room, a woman tore herself loose from the attend-

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ants holding her, and running swiftly across the room leaped upon the platform. She was a slight little woman, almost a child in appearance beside the man's gigantic stature. She stood looking at him a moment with heaving breast and great sorrowful eyes from which the tears were welling out, and flowing down her cheeks unheeded.

The man's face softened. He put his hands gently upon the sides of her neck. Then, as she began sobbing, he folded her in his great arms. For an instant she clung to him. Then he pushed her away. Still crying softly, she descended from the platform, and walked slowly back across the room.

Hardly had she disappeared when there arose from the street outside a faint, confused murmur, as of an angry crowd gathering. The judge had left his seat now and the jury was filing out of the room.

The Chemist turned to his friends. "Shall we go?" he asked.

"This trial—" began the Big Business Man. "You haven't told us its significance. This man—good God what a figure of power and hate and evil. Who is he?"

"It must have been evident to you, gentlemen," the Chemist spoke quietly, "that you have been witnessing an event of the utmost importance to us all. I have to tell you of the crisis facing us; this trial is its latest development. That man—"

The insistent murmur from the street grew louder. Shouts arose and then a loud pounding from the side of the building.

The Chemist broke off abruptly and rose to his feet. "Come outside," he said.

They followed him through a doorway on to a balcony, overlooking the street. Gathered before the court-house was a crowd of several hundred men and women. They surged up against its entrance angrily, and were held in check there by the armed attendants on guard. A smaller crowd was pounding violently upon a side door of the building. Several people ran shouting down the street, spreading the excitement through the city.

The Chemist and his companions stood in the doorway of the balcony an instant, silently regarding this ominous scene. The Chemist was just about to step forward, when, upon another balcony, nearer the corner of the building a woman appeared. She stepped close to the edge of the parapet and raised her arms commandingly.

It was Lylda. She had laid aside her court robe and stood now in her glistening silver tunic. Her hair was uncoiled, and fell in dark masses over her white shoulders, blowing out behind her in the wind.

The crowd hesitated at the sight of her, and quieted a little. She stood rigid as a statue for a moment, holding her arms outstretched. Then, dropping them with a gesture of appeal she began to speak.

At the sound of her voice, clear and vibrant, yet soft, gentle and womanly, there came silence from below, and, after a moment every face was upturned to hers. Gradually her voice rose in pitch. Its gentle tone was gone now—it became forceful, commanding. Then again she flung out her arms with a dramatic gesture and stood rigid, every line of her body denoting power—almost imperious command. Abruptly she ceased speaking, and, as she stood motionless, slowly at first, the crowd silently dispersed.

The street below was soon clear. Even those onlookers at a distance turned the corner and disappeared. Another moment passed, and then Lylda swayed and sank upon the floor of the balcony, with her head on her arms against its low stone railing—just a tired, gentle, frightened little woman.

"She did it—how wonderfully she did it," the Very Young Man murmured in admiration.

"We can handle them now," answered the Chemist. "But each time it is harder. Let us get Lylda and go home, gentlemen. I want to tell you all about it." He turned to leave the balcony.

"Who was the man? What was he tried for?" the Very Young Man asked impulsively.

"That trial was the first of its kind ever held," the Chemist answered. "The man was condemned to death. It was a new

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crime—the gravest we have ever had to face—the crime of treason."

CHAPTER XV

LYLDA'S PLAN

BACK home, comfortably seated upon the broad balcony overlooking the lake, the three men sat waiting to hear their host's explanation of the strange events they had witnessed. Lylda busied herself preparing a light noonday meal, which she served charmingly on the balcony while they talked.

"My friends," the Chemist began. "I tried to give you this morning, a picture of this world and the life I have been leading here. I think you understand, although I did not specifically say so, that all I said related to the time when I first came here. That you would call this life Utopia, because of the way I outlined it, I do not doubt; or at least you would call it a state of affairs as near Utopian as any human beings can approach.

"All that is true; it was Utopia. But gentlemen, it is so no longer. Things have been changing of recent years, until now—well, you saw what happened this morning.

"I cannot account for the first cause of this trouble. Perhaps the Malite war, with its disillusionment to our people—I do not know. Faith in human kindness was broken; the Oroids could no longer trust implicitly in each other. A gradual distrust arose—a growing unrest—a dissatisfaction, which made no demands at first, nor seemed indeed to have any definite grievances of any sort. There sprang leaders, who by their greater intelligence created desires that fed and nourished their dissatisfaction—gave it a seemingly tangible goal that made it far more dangerous than it ever had been before.

"About a year ago there first came into prominence the man whom you saw this morning condemned to death. His name is Targo—he is a Malite—full blooded I believe, although he says not. For twenty years or more he has lived in Orlog, a city some fifty miles from Arite. His wife is an Oroid.

"Targo, by his eloquence, and the power and force of his personality, won a large following in Orlog, and to a lesser degree in many other cities. Twice, some months ago, he was arrested and reprimanded; the last time with a warning that a third offense would mean his death."

"What is he after?" asked the Very Young Man.

"The Targos, as they are called, demand principally a different division of the land. Under the present system, approximately one third of all the land is in the hands of the government. Of that, generally more than half lies idle most of the time. The Targos wish to have this land divided among the citizens. They claim also that most of the city organizations do not produce as large a dividend as the Targos could show under their own management. They have many other grievances that there is no reason for me to detail."

"Why not let them try out their theories in some city?" suggested the Big Business Man.

"They are trying them," the Chemist answered. "There was a revolution in Orlog about six months ago. Several of its officials were assassinated—almost the first murders we have ever had. The Targos took possession of the government. A brother of this man you saw this morning became leader of the city. Orlog withdrew from the Oroid government and is now handling its affairs as a separate nation."

"I wonder—" began the Big Business Man thoughtfully. "Well, why not let them run it that way, if they want to?"

"No reason, if they were sincere. But they are not sincere nor honest fundamentally. Their leaders are for the most part Malites, or Oroids with Malite blood. And they are fooling the people. Their followers are all the more unintelligent, more gullible individuals, or those in whom there lies a latent criminal streak.

"The thing doesn't work. Sexual license is growing in Orlog. Crimes against women are becoming more and more frequent.

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Offenses committed by those prominent, or in authority, go unpunished. Women's testimony is discredited, often by concerted lying on the part of men witnesses.

"Many families are leaving Orlog—leaving their land and their homes deserted. In other cities where the Targos threaten to gain control the same thing is happening. Most of these refugees come to Arite. We cannot take care of them; there is not enough land here."

"Why not take your army and clean them up?" suggested the Very Young Man.

THEY were seated around a little table, at which Lylda was serving lunch. At the question she stopped in the act of pouring a steaming liquid from a little metal kettle into their dainty golden drinking cups and looked at the Very Young Man gravely.

"Very easy it would be to do that perhaps," she said quietly. "But these Targos, except a few—they are our own people. And they, too, are armed. We cannot fight them; we cannot kill them—our own people."

"We may have to," said the Chemist. "But you see, I did not realize, I could not believe the extent to which this Targo could sway the people. Nor did I at first realize what evils would result if his ideas were carried out. He has many followers right here in Arite. You saw that this morning."

"How did you catch him?" interrupted the Very Young Man.

"Yesterday he came to Arite," said Lylda. "He came to speak. With him came fifty others. With them, too, came his wife to speak here, to our women. He thought we would do nothing; he defied us. There was a fight, this morning, and many were killed. And we brought him to the Court—you saw."

"It is a serious situation," said the Doctor. "I had no idea—"

"We can handle it. We must handle it," said the Chemist. "But as Lylda says, we cannot kill our own people. Only as a last desperate measure."

"Suppose you wait too long," suggested the Big Business Man. "You say these Targos are gaining strength every day. You might have a very bad civil war."

"That was the problem," answered the Chemist.

"But now you come," said Lylda. "You change it all when you come down to us out of the great beyond. Our people, they call you genii of the Master; they—"

"Oh, gee, I never thought of that," murmured the Very Young Man. "What do you think of us?"

"They think you are supernatural beings of course," the Chemist said, smiling. "Yet they accept you without fear and they look to you and to me for help."

"This morning, there at the Court," said Lylda, "I heard them say that Targo spoke against you. Devils, he said, from the Great Blue Star, come here with evil for us all. And they believe him, some of them. It was for that perhaps they acted as they did before the Court. In Arite now, many believe in Targo. And it is bad, very bad."

"The truth is," added the Chemist, "your coming, while it gives us unlimited possibilities for commanding the course of events, at the same time has precipitated the crisis. Naturally no one can understand who or what you are. And as Lylda says, the Targos undoubtedly are telling the people you come to ally yourself with me for evil. There will be thousands who will listen to them and fear and hate you, especially in some of the other cities."

"What does the king say?" asked the Doctor.

"We will see him to-morrow. He has been anxiously waiting for you. But you must not forget," the Chemist added with a smile, "the king has had little experience facing strife or evil doing of any kind. It was almost unknown until recently. It is I, and you, gentlemen, who are facing the problem of saving this nation."

The Very Young Man's face was flushed, and his eyes sparkled with excitement. "We can do anything we like," he said. "We have the power."

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"Ay, that is it," said Lylda. "The power we have. But my friend, we cannot use it. Not for strife, for death; we cannot."

"The execution of Targo will cause more trouble," said the Chemist thoughtfully. "It is bound to make—"

"When will you put him to death?" asked the Big Business Man.

"To-morrow he dies," Lylda answered. "To-morrow, before the time of sleep."

"There will be trouble," said the Chemist again. "We are in no personal danger of course, but, for the people who now believe in Targo, I am afraid."

"A plan I have made," said Lylda. She sat forward tensely in her chair, brushing her hair back from her face with a swift gesture. "A plan I have made. It is the only way now—I think—that maybe there comes no harm to our people. It is that we want to do, if we can." She spoke eagerly, and without waiting for them to answer.

"This drug that you have brought, I shall take it. And I shall get big. Oh, not so very big, but big enough to be the height of a man it may be ten times. Then shall I talk to the people—I, Lylda—woman of the Master, and then shall I tell them that this power, this magic is for good, not for evil, if only they will give up Targo and all who are with him."

"I will take it with you," said the Chemist. "Together we—"

"No, no, my husband. Alone I must do this. Ah, do you not know they say these stranger devils with their magic come for evil? And you, too, must you not forget, once were a stranger just as they. That the people know; that they remember.

"But I—I—Lylda—a woman of the Oroids I am—full-blooded Oroid, no stranger. And they will believe me—a woman—for they know I cannot lie.

"I shall tell them I am for good, for kindness, for all we had, that time before the Malite war, when every one was happy. And if they will not believe, if as I say they will not do, then shall my power be indeed for evil, and all who will obey me not shall die. But they will believe—no need will there be to threaten.

"TO MANY cities I will go. And in them, all of those who want to live by Targo's law will I send to Orlog. And all in Orlog who believe him not, will I tell to leave, and to the other cities go to make their homes. Then Orlog shall be Targo's city. And to-morrow we will not die, but go there into Orlog and become their king. For I shall say it may be there are some who like his rule of evil. Or it may be he is good in different fashions, and in time can make us see that his law, too, is just and kind.

"Then shall live in Orlog all who wish to stay. And we shall watch their rule, but never shall we let them pass beyond their borders. For if they do, then shall we kill them.

"All this I can do, my husband, if you but will let me try. For me they will believe, a woman, Oroid all of blood—for they know women do not lie." She stopped and the fire in her eyes changed to a look of gentle pleading. "If you will but let me try," she finished. "My husband—please."

The Chemist glanced at his friends who sat astonished by this flow of eager, impassioned words. Then he turned again to Lylda's intent, pleading face, regarding her tenderly. "You are very fine, little mother of my son," he said gently, lapsing for a moment into her own style of speech. "It could do no harm," he added thoughtfully, "and perhaps—"

"Let her try it," said the Doctor. "No harm could come to her."

"No harm to me could come," said Lylda quickly. "And I shall make them believe. I can, because I am a woman, and they will know I tell the truth. Ah, you will let me try, my husband. Please?"

The Chemist appealed to the others. "They will believe her, many of them," he said. "They will leave Orlog as she directs. But those in other cities will still hold to Targo, they will simply remain silent for a time. What their feelings will be or are we cannot tell. Some will leave and go to Orlog of course, for Lylda will offer freedom of their leader and to secure that they will seem to agree to anything.

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"But after all, they are nothing but children at heart, most of them. To-day, they might believe in Lylda; to-morrow Targo could win them again."

"He won't get a chance," put in the Very Young Man quickly. "If she says we kill anybody who talks for Targo outside of Orlog, that goes. It's the only way, isn't it?"

"And she might really convince them, or most of them," added the Doctor.

"You will let me try?" asked Lylda softly. The Chemist nodded.

Lylda sprang to her feet. Her frail little body was trembling with emotion; on her face was a look almost of exaltation.

"You *will* let me try!" she cried. "Then I shall make them believe. Here, now, this very hour, I shall make them know the truth. And they, my own people, shall I save from sorrow, misery and death."

She turned to the Chemist and spoke rapidly.

"My husband, will you send Oteo now, up into the city. Him will you tell to have others spread the news. All who desire an end to Targo's rule, shall come here at once. And all, too, who in him believe, and who for him want freedom, they shall come, too. Let Oteo tell them magic shall be performed and Lylda will speak with them.

"Make haste, my husband, for now I go to change my dress. Not as the Master's woman will I speak, but as Lylda—Oroid woman—woman of the people." And with a flashing glance, she turned and swiftly left the balcony.

CHAPTER XVI

LYLDA ACTS

"SHE'LL do it," the Very Young Man murmured, staring at the doorway through which Lylda had disappeared. "She can do anything."

The Chemist rose to his feet. "I'll send Oteo. Will you wait here, gentlemen? And will you have some of the drugs ready for Lylda? You have them with you?" The men nodded.

"How about Lylda carrying the drugs?" asked the Very Young Man. "And what about her clothes?"

"I have already made a belt for Lylda and for myself—some time ago," the Chemist answered. "During the first year I was here I made several experiments with the drugs. I found that almost anything within the immediate—shall I say influence?—of the body, will contract with it. Almost any garment, even a loose robe will change size. You found that to be so to some extent. Those belts you wore down—"

"That's true," agreed the Doctor, "there seems to be considerable latitude—"

"I decided," the Chemist went on, "that immediately after your arrival we should all wear the drugs constantly. You can use the armpit pouches if you wish; Lylda and I will wear these belts I have made."

Oteo, the Chemist's personal servant, a slim youth with a bright, intelligent face listened carefully to his master's directions and then left the house hurriedly, running up the street toward the center of the city. Once or twice he stopped and spoke to passersby for a moment, gathering a crowd around him each time.

The Chemist rejoined his friends on the balcony. "There will be a thousand people here in half an hour," he said quietly. "I have sent a message to the men in charge of the government workshops; they will have their people cease work to come here."

Lylda appeared in a few moments more. She was dressed as the Chemist had seen her first through his microscope—in a short, gray skirt reaching from waist to knees. Only now she wore also two circular metal disks strapped over her breasts. Her hair was unbound and fell in masses forward over her shoulders. Around her waist was a broad girdle of golden cloth with small pouches for holding the chemicals. She took her place among the men quietly.

"See, I am ready," she said with a smile. "Oteo, you have sent him?" The Chemist nodded.

Lylda turned to the Doctor. "You will tell me, what is to do with the drugs?"

They explained in a few words. By now

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a considerable crowd had gathered before the house, and up the street many others were hurrying down. Directly across from the entrance to Lylda's garden, back of the bluff at the lake front was a large open space with a fringe of trees at its back. In this open space the crowd was collecting.

The Chemist rose after a moment and from the roof-top spoke a few words to the people in the street below. They answered him with shouts of applause mingled with a hum of murmured anger underneath. The Chemist went back to his friends, his face set and serious.

As he dropped in his chair Lylda knelt on the floor before him, laying her arms on his knees. "I go to do for our people the best I can," she said softly, looking up into his face. "Now I go, but to you I will come back soon." The Chemist tenderly put his hand upon the glossy smoothness of her hair.

"I go—now," she repeated, and reached for one of the vials under her arm. Holding it in her hand, she stared at it a moment, silently, in awe. Then she shuddered like a frightened child and buried her face in the Chemist's lap, huddling her little body up close against his legs as if for protection.

The Chemist did not move or speak, but sat quiet with his hand gently stroking her hair. In a moment she again raised her face to his. Her long lashes were wet with tears, but her lips were smiling.

"I am ready—now," she said gently. She brushed her tears from her eyes and rose to her feet. Drawing herself to her full height, she tossed back her head and flung out her arms before her.

"No one can know I am afraid—but you," she said. "And I—shall forget." She dropped her arms and stood passive.

"I go now to take the drug—there in the little garden behind, where no one can notice. You will come down?"

The Big Business Man cleared his throat. When he spoke his voice was tremulous with emotion.

"How long will you be gone, Lylda?"

The woman turned to him with a smile. "Soon will I return, so I believe," she answered. "I go to Orlog, to Raito, and to Tele. But never shall I wait, nor speak long, and fast will I walk. Before the time of sleep has descended upon us, I shall be here."

IN THE little garden behind the house, out of sight of the crowd on the other side, Lylda prepared to take the drug. She was standing there, with the four men, when Loto burst upon them, throwing himself into his mother's arms.

"Oh *mamita, mamita,*" he cried, clinging to her. "There in the street outside, they say such terrible things—of you *mamita.* 'The master's woman' I heard one say, 'She has the evil magic.' And another spoke of Targo. And they say he must not die, or there will be death for those who kill him."

Lylda held the boy close as he poured out his breathless frightened words.

"No matter, little son," she said tenderly. "To *mamita* no harm can come, you shall see. Did my father teach you well to-day?"

"But *mamita,* one man who saw me standing, called me an evil name and spoke of you, my mother Lylda. And a woman looked with a look I never saw before. I am afraid, *mamita.*"

With quivering lips that smiled, Lylda kissed the little boy tenderly, and gently loosening his hold, pushed him toward his father.

"The Master's son, Loto, never can he be afraid," she said with gentle reproof. "That must you remember, always."

The little group in the garden close up against the house stood silent as Lylda took a few grains of the drug. The noise and shouts of the crowd in front were now plainly audible. One voice was raised above the others, as though someone were making a speech.

Loto stood beside his father, and the Chemist laid his arm across the boy's shoulder. As Lylda began visibly to increase in size, the boy uttered a startled cry. Meet-

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ing his mother's steady gaze he shut his lips tight, and stood rigid, watching her with wide, horrified eyes.

Lylda had grown nearly twice her normal size before she spoke. Then, smiling down at the men, she said evenly, "From the roof, perhaps, you will watch."

"You know what to do if you grow too large," the Doctor said huskily.

"I know, my friend. I thank you all. And good-by." She met the Chemist's glance an instant. Then abruptly she faced about and walking close to the house, stood at its further corner facing the lake.

After a moment's hesitation the Chemist led his friends to the roof. As they appeared at the edge of the parapet a great shout rolled up from the crowd below. Nearly a thousand people had gathered. The street was crowded and in the open space beyond they stood in little groups. On a slight eminence near the lake bluff, a man stood haranguing those around him. He was a short, very thick-set little man, with very long arms—a squat, apelike figure. He talked loudly and indignantly; around him perhaps a hundred people stood listening, applauding at intervals.

When the Chemist appeared this man stopped with a final phrase of vituperation and a wave of his fist toward the house.

The Chemist stood silent, looking out over the throng. "How large is she now?" he asked the Very Young Man softly. The Very Young Man ran across the roof to its farther corner and was back in an instant.

"They'll see her soon—look here." His friends turned at his words. At the corner of the house they could just see the top of Lylda's head above the edge of the parapet. As they watched she grew still taller and in another moment her forehead appeared. She turned her head, and her great eyes smiled softly at them across the roof-top. In a few moments more (she had evidently stopped growing) with a farewell glance at her husband, she stepped around the corner of the house into full view of the crowd—a woman over sixty feet tall, standing quietly in the garden with one hand resting upon the roof of the house behind her.

A cry of terror rose from the people as she appeared. Most of those in the street ran in fright back into the field behind. Then, seeing her standing motionless with a gentle smile on her face, they stopped, irresolute. A few held their ground, frankly curious and unafraid. Others stood sullen and defiant.

When the people had quieted a little Lylda raised her arms in greeting and spoke, softly, yet with a voice that carried far away over the field. As she talked the people seemed to recover their composure rapidly. Her tremendous size no longer seemed to horrify them. Those who obviously at first were friendly appeared now quite at ease; the others, with their lessening terror, were visibly more hostile.

Once Lylda mentioned the name of Targo. A scattered shout came up from the crowd; the apelike man shouted out something to those near him, and then, leaving his knoll, disappeared.

As Lylda continued, the hostile element in the crowd grew more insistent. They did not listen to her now but shouted back, in derision and defiance. Then suddenly a stone was thrown; it struck Lylda on the breast, hitting her metal breast-plate with a thud and dropping at her feet.

As though at a signal a hail of stones flew up from the crowd, most of them striking Lylda like tiny pebbles, a few of the larger ones bounding against the house, or landing on its roof.

At this attack Lylda abruptly stopped speaking, and took a step forward menacingly. The hail of stones continued. Then she turned toward the roof-top, where the men and the little boy stood behind the parapet, sheltering themselves from the flying stones.

"Only one way there is," said Lylda sadly, in a soft whisper that they plainly heard above the noise of the crowd. "I am sorry, my husband, but I must."

A stone struck her shoulder. She faced the crowd again; a gentle look of sorrow was in her eyes, but her mouth was stern.

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In the street below at the edge of the field the squat little man had reappeared. It was from here that most of the stones seemed to come.

"That man there, by the road." The Chemist pointed. "One of Targo's—"

In three swift steps Lylda was across the garden, with one foot over the wall into the street. Reaching down she caught the man between her huge fingers, and held him high over her head an instant so that all might see.

The big crowd was silent with terror; the man high in the air over their heads screamed horribly. Lylda hesitated only a moment more; then she threw back her arm and with a great sweep, flung her screaming victim far out into the lake.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ESCAPE OF TARGO

"I AM very much afraid it was a wrong move," said the Chemist gravely.

They were sitting in a corner of the roof, talking over the situation. Lylda had left the city; the last they had seen of her, she was striding rapidly away, over the country toward Orlog. The street and field before the house now was nearly deserted.

"She had to do it, of course," the Chemist continued, "but to kill Targo's brother—"

"I wonder," began the Big Business Man thoughtfully. "It seems to me this disturbance is becoming far more serious than we think. It isn't so much a political issue now between your government and the followers of Targo, as it is a struggle against those of us who have this magic, as they call it."

"That's just the point," put in the Doctor quickly. "They are making the people believe that our power of changing size is a menace that—"

"If I had only realized," said the Chemist. "I thought your coming would help. Apparently it was the very worst thing that could have happened."

"Not for you personally," interjected the Very Young Man. "We're perfectly safe—and Lylda, and Loto." He put his arm affectionately around the boy who sat close beside him. "You are not afraid, are you, Loto?"

"Now I am not," answered the boy seriously. "But this morning, when I left my grandfather, coming home—"

"You were afraid for your mother. That was it, wasn't it?" finished the Very Young Man. "Does your grandfather teach you?"

"Yes—he, and father, and mother."

"I want you to see Lylda's father," said the Chemist. "There is nothing we can do now until Lylda returns. Shall we walk up there?" They all agreed readily.

"I may go, too?" Loto asked, looking at his father.

"You have your lessons," said the Chemist.

"But my father, it is so very lonely without mother," protested the boy.

The Chemist smiled gently. "Afraid, little son, to stay with Oteo?"

"He's not afraid," said the Very Young Man stoutly.

The little boy looked from one to the other of them a moment silently. Then, calling Oteo's name, he ran across the roof and down into the house.

"Five years ago," said the Chemist, as the child disappeared, "there was hardly such an emotion in this world as fear or hate or anger. Now the pendulum is swinging to the other extreme. I suppose that's natural, but—" He ended with a sigh, and, breaking his train of thought, rose to his feet. "Shall we start?"

Lylda's father greeted them gravely, with a dignity, and yet obvious cordiality that was quite in accord with his appearance. He was a man over sixty. His still luxuriant white hair fell to his shoulders. His face was hairless, for in this land all men's faces were as devoid of hair as those of the women. He was dressed in a long, flowing robe similar to those his visitors were wearing.

"Because—you come—I am glad," he said with a smile, as he shook hands in their own manner. He spoke slowly, with

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frequent pauses, as though carefully picking his words. "But—an old man—I know not the language of you."

He led them into a room that evidently was his study, for in it they saw many strange instruments, and on a table a number of loosely bound sheets of parchment that were his books. They took the seats he offered and looked around them curiously.

"There is the clock we spoke of," said the Chemist, indicating one of the larger instruments that stood on a pedestal in a corner of the room. "Reoh will explain it to you."

Their host addressed the Chemist. "From Oteo I hear—the news to-day is bad?" he asked with evident concern.

"I am afraid it is," the Chemist answered seriously.

"And Lylda?"

The Chemist recounted briefly the events of the day. "We can only wait until Lylda returns," he finished. "To-morrow we will talk with the king."

"Bad it is," said the old man slowly; "very bad. But—we shall see—"

The Very Young Man had risen to his feet and was standing beside the clock.

"How does it work?" he asked. "What time is it now?"

Reoh appealed to his son-in-law. "To tell of it—the words I know not."

The Chemist smiled. "You are too modest, my father. But I will help you out, if you insist." He turned to the others, who were gathered around him, looking at the clock.

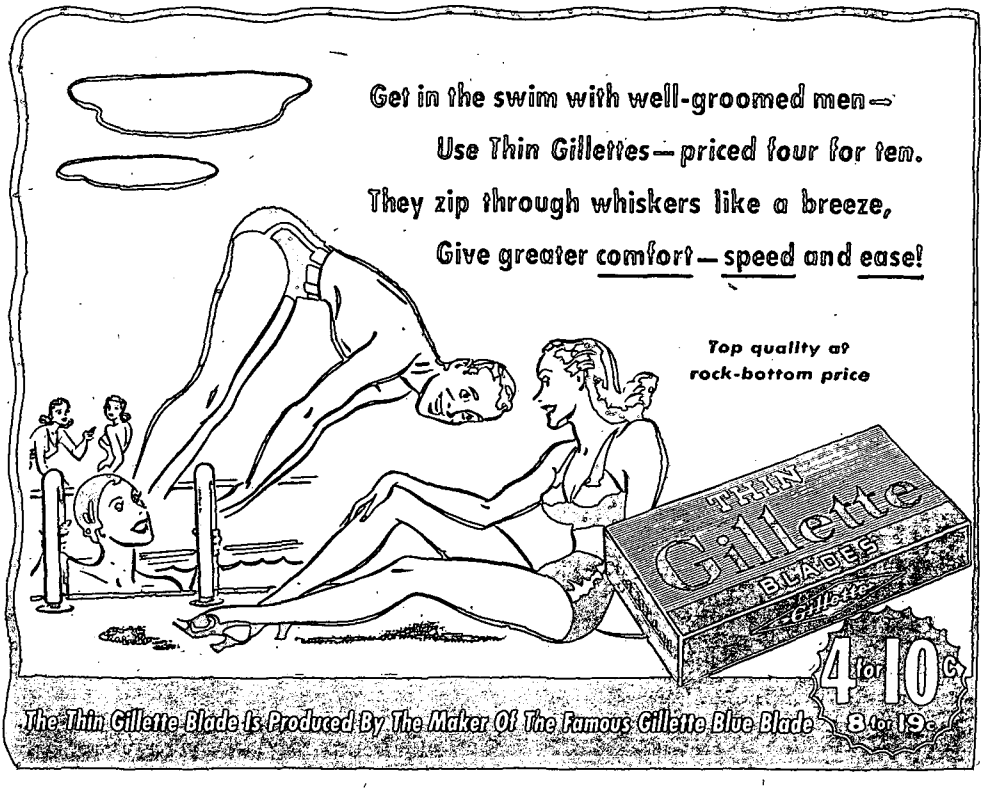
"Our measurement of our time here," he began, "like yours, is based on—"

"Excuse me," interrupted the Very Young Man. "I just want to know first what time it is now?"

"It is in the fourth eclipse," said the Chemist with a twinkle.

The Very Young Man was too surprised by this unexpected answer to question further, and the Chemist went on.

"We measure time by the astronomical movements, just as you do in your world.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One of the larger stars has a satellite which revolves around it with extreme rapidity. Here at Arite, this satellite passes nearly always directly behind its controlling star. In other words, it is eclipsed. Ten of these eclipses measure the passage of our day. We rise generally at the first eclipse or about that time. It is now the fourth eclipse; you would call it late afternoon. Do you see?"

"HOW is the time gaged here?" asked the Big Business Man, indicating the clock.

The instrument stood upon a low stone pedestal. It consisted of a transparent cylinder about twelve inches in diameter and some four feet high, surmounted by a large circular bowl. The cylinder was separated from the bowl by a broad disk of porous stone; a similar stone section divided the cylinder horizontally into halves. From the bowl a fluid was dropping in a tiny stream through the top stone segment into the upper compartment, which was about half full. This in turn filtered through the second stone into the lower compartment. This lower section was marked in front with a large number of fine horizontal lines, an equal distance apart, but of unequal length. In it the fluid stood now just above one of the longer lines—the fourth from the bottom. On the top of this fluid floated a circular disk almost the size of the inside diameter of the cylinder.

The Chemist explained. "It is really very much like the old hour-glass we used to have in your world. This filters liquid instead of sand. You will notice the water filters twice." He indicated the two compartments. "That is because it is necessary to have a liquid that is absolutely pure in order that the rate at which it filters through this other stone may remain constant. The clock is carefully tested, so that for each eclipse the water will rise in this lower part of the cylinder, just the distance from here to here."

The Chemist put his fingers on two of the longer marks.

"Is it accurate?" asked the Doctor.

"Not so accurate as your watches, of course," the Chemist answered. "But still, it serves the purpose. These ten longer lines, you see, mark the ten eclipses that constitute one of our days. The shorter lines between indicate halves and quarter intervals."

"Then it is only good for one day?" asked the Very Young Man. "How do you set it?"

"It resets automatically each day, at the beginning of the first eclipse. This disk—" the Chemist pointed to the disk floating on the water in the lower compartment. "This disk rises with the water on which it is floating. When it reaches the top of it, it comes in contact with a simple mechanism—you'll see it up there— which opens a gate below and drains out the water in a moment. So that every morning it is emptied and starts filling up again. All that is needed is to keep this bowl full of water."

"It certainly seems very practical," observed the Big Business Man. "Are there many in use?"

"Quite a number, yes. This clock was invented by Reoh, some thirty years ago. He is the greatest scientist and scholar we have." The old man smiled deprecatingly at this compliment.

"Are these books?" asked the Very Young Man; he had wandered over to the table and was fingering one of the bound sheets of parchment.

"They are Reoh's chronicles," the Chemist answered. "The only ones of their kind in Arite."

"What's this?" The Very Young Man pointed to another instrument.

"That is an astronomical instrument, something like a sextant— also an invention of Reoh's. Here is a small telescope and—" The Chemist paused and went over to another table standing at the side of the room.

"That reminds me, gentlemen," he continued; "I have something here in which you will be greatly interested."

"What you—will see," said Reoh softly, as they gathered around the Chemist, "you only, of all people, can understand.

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Each day I look, and I wonder; but never can I believe."

"I made this myself, nearly ten years ago," said the Chemist lifting up the instrument; "a microscope. It is not very large, you see; nor is it very powerful. But I want you to look through it." With his cigar-lighter he ignited a short length of wire that burned slowly with a brilliant blue spot of light. In his hand he held a small piece of stone.

"I made this microscope hoping that I might prove with it still more conclusively my original theory of the infinite smallness of human life. For many months I searched into various objects, but without success. Finally I came upon this bit of rock." The Chemist adjusted it carefully under the microscope with the light shining brilliantly upon it.

"You see I have marked one place; I am going to let you look into it there."

The Doctor stepped forward. As he looked they heard his quick intake of breath. After a moment he raised his head. On his face was an expression of awe too deep for words. He made place for the others, and stood silent.

When the Very Young Man's turn came he looked into the eyepiece awkwardly. His heart was beating fast; for some reason he felt frightened.

At first he saw nothing. "Keep the other eye open," said the Chemist.

The Very Young Man did as he was directed. After a moment there appeared before him a vast stretch of open country. As from a great height he stared down at the scene spread out below him. Gradually it became clearer. He saw water, with the sunlight—his own kind of sunlight it seemed—shining upon it. He stared for a moment more, dazzled by the light. Then, nearer to him, he saw a grassy slope that seemed to be on a mountainside above the water. On this slope he saw animals grazing, and beside them a man, formed like himself.

The Chemist's voice came to him from far away. "We are all of us here in a world that only occupies a portion of one little atom of the gold of a wedding-ring. Yet what you see there in that stone—"

THE Very Young Man raised his head. Before him stood the microscope, with its fragment of stone gleaming to the blue light of the burning wire. He wanted to say something to show them how he felt, but no word came. He looked up into the Chemist's smiling face, and smiled back a little foolishly.

"Every day I look," said Reoh, breaking the silence. "And I see—wonderful things. But never really—can I believe."

At this moment there came a violent rapping upon the outer door. As Reoh left the room to open it, the Very Young Man picked up the bit of stone that the Chemist had just taken from the microscope.

"I wish—may I keep it?" he asked impulsively.

The Chemist smiled and nodded, and the Very Young Man was about to slip it into the pocket of his robe when Reoh hastily re-entered the room, followed by Oteo. The youth was breathing heavily, as though he had been running, and on his face was a frightened look.

"Bad; very bad," said the old man, in a tone of deep concern, as they came through the doorway.

"What is it, Oteo?" asked the Chemist quickly. The boy answered him with a flood of words in his native tongue.

The Chemist listened quietly. Then he turned to his companions.

"Targo has escaped," he said briefly. "They sent word to me at home, and Oteo ran here to tell me. A crowd broke into the court-house and released him. Oteo says they went away by water, and that no one is following them."

The youth, who evidently understood English, added something else in his own language.

"He says Targo vowed death to all who have the magic power. He spoke in the city just now, and promised them deliverance from the giants."

"Good Lord," murmured the Very Young Man.

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"He has gone to Orlog probably," the Chemist continued. "We have nothing to fear for the moment. But that he could speak, in the center of Arite, after this morning, and that the people would listen—"

"It seems to me things are getting worse every minute," said the Big Business Man.

Oteo spoke again. The Chemist translated. "The police did nothing. They simply stood and listened, but took no part."

"Bad; very bad," repeated the old man, shaking his head.

"What we should do I confess I cannot tell," said the Chemist soberly. "But that we should do something drastic is obvious."

"We can't do anything until Lylda gets back," declared the Very Young Man. "We'll see what she has done. We might have had to let Targo go anyway."

The Chemist started toward the door. "To-night, by the time of sleep, Reoh," he said to the old man, "I expect Lylda will have returned. You had better come to us then with Aura. I do not think you should stay here alone to sleep to-night."

"In a moment—Aura comes," Reoh answered. "We shall be with you—very soon."

The Chemist motioned to his companions, and with obvious reluctance on the part of the Very Young Man, they left, followed by Oteo.

On the way back the city seemed quiet—abnormally so. The streets were nearly deserted; what few pedestrians they met avoided them, or passed them sullenly. They were perhaps half-way back to the Chemist's house when the Very Young Man stopped short.

"I forgot that piece of stone," he explained, looking at them queerly. "Go on. I'll be there by the time you are." And disregarding the Chemist's admonition that he might get lost, he left them abruptly and walked swiftly back over the way they had come.

Without difficulty, for they had made few turns, the Very Young Man located Reoh's house. As he approached he noticed the figure of a man lounging against a further corner of the building; the figure disappeared almost as soon as he saw it.

It was a trivial incident, but, somehow, to the Very Young Man, it held something in it of impending danger. He did not knock on the outer door, but finding it partly open, he slowly pushed it wider and stepped quietly into the hallway beyond. He was hardly inside when there came from within the house a girl's scream—a cry of horror, abruptly stifled.

For an instant, the Very Young Man stood hesitating. Then he dashed forward through an open doorway in the direction from which the cry had seemed to come.

The room into which he burst was Reoh's study; the room he had left only a few moments before. On the floor, almost across his path, lay the old man, with the short blade of a sword buried to the hilt in his breast. In a corner of the room a young Oroid girl stood with her back against the wall. Her hands were pressed against her mouth; her eyes were wide with terror. Bending over the body on the floor with a hand at its armpit, knelt the huge, gray figure of a man. At the sound of the intruder's entrance he looked up quickly and sprang to his feet.

The Very Young Man saw it was Targo!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ABDUCTION

WHEN the Very Young Man left them so unceremoniously, the Chemist and his companions continued on their way home, talking earnestly over the serious turn affairs had taken. Of the three, the Big Business Man appeared the most perturbed.

"Lylda isn't going to accomplish anything," he said. "It won't work. The thing has gone too far. It isn't politics any longer; it's a struggle against us—a hatred and fear of our supernatural powers."

"If we had never come—" began the Doctor.

"It probably would have worked out all right," finished the Big Business Man. "But since we're here—"

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"We could leave," the Doctor suggested.

"It has gone too far; I agree with you," the Chemist said. "Your going would not help. They would never believe I did not still possess the magic. And now, without the drugs I might not be able to cope with affairs. It is a very serious situation."

"And getting worse all the time," added the Big Business Man.

When they arrived at the Chemist's house Loto did not run out to meet them as the Chemist expected. They called his name, but there was no answer. Inside the house they perceived at once that something was wrong. The living-room was in disorder; some of the pieces of furniture had been overturned, and many of the smaller articles were scattered about the floor. Even the wall-hangings had been torn down.

In sudden fear the Chemist ran through the building, calling to Loto. Everywhere he saw evidence of intruders, who had ransacked the rooms, as though making a hasty search. In one of the rooms, crouched on the floor, he came upon Eena, Lylda's little serving-maid. The girl was stricken dumb with terror. At the sight of her master she sobbed with relief, and after a few moments told him what had happened.

When the Chemist rejoined his friends in the lower room his face was set and white. The girl followed him closely, evidently afraid to be left alone. The Chemist spoke quietly, controlling his emotion with obvious difficulty.

"Loto has been stolen!" he said. "Targo and four of his men were here soon after we left. Eena saw them and hid. They searched the house—"

"For the drugs," muttered the Doctor under his breath.

"—and then left, taking Loto with them."

"Which way did they go?" asked the Big Business Man. "Good Heavens, what a thing!"

"They went by water, in a large boat that was waiting for them here," answered the Chemist.

"How long ago?" asked the Doctor quickly. "We have not been gone very long."

"An hour probably, not much more." Eena said something to her master and began to cry softly.

"She says they left a little while ago. Three of the men took Loto away in the boat. She watched them from the window up-stairs."

"*Targo aliá,*" said the girl.

"One of the men was Targo," said the Chemist. He went to one of the windows overlooking the lake; the Doctor stood beside him. There was no boat in sight.

"They cannot have got very far," said the Doctor. "Those islands there—"

"They would take him to Orlog," said the Chemist. "About fifty miles."

The Doctor turned back to the room. "We can get them. You forget—these drugs—the power they give us. Oh, Will." He called the Big Business Man over to them; he spoke hurriedly, with growing excitement. "What do you think, Will? That boat—they've got Loto—it can't be very far. We can make ourselves so large in half an hour we can wade all over the lake. We can get it. What do you think?"

The Chemist dropped into a chair with his head in his hands. "Let me think—just a moment, Frank. I know the power we have; I know we can do almost anything. That little boy of mine—they've got him. Let me think—just a moment."

He sat motionless. The Doctor continued talking in a lower tone to the Big Business Man by the window. In the doorway Oteo stood like a statue, motionless, except for his big, soft eyes that roved unceasingly over the scene before him. After a moment Eena ceased her sobbing and knelt beside the Chemist, looking up at him sorrowfully.

"I cannot believe," said the Chemist finally, raising his head, "that the safest way to rescue Loto is by the plan you have suggested." He spoke with his usual calm, judicial manner, having regained control of himself completely. "I understand now, thoroughly, and for the first

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time, the situation we are facing. It is, as you say, a political issue no longer. Targo and his closest followers have convinced a very large proportion of our entire nation, I am certain, that myself, and my family, and you, the strangers, are possessed of a diabolical power that must be annihilated. Targo will never rest until he has the drugs. That is why he searched the house.

"HE HAS abducted Loto for the same purpose. He will not hurt Loto. I am convinced of that. Probably he will send some one to me to-morrow to demand the drugs as the price of Loto's life. But don't you understand? Targo and his advisers, and even the most ignorant of the people, realize the power we have. Lylda showed them that when she flung Targo's brother out into the lake to-day. But we cannot use this power openly. For, while it makes us invincible, it makes them correspondingly desperate. They are a peculiar people. Throughout the whole history of the race they have been kindly, thoughtless children. Now they are aroused. The pendulum has swung to the other extreme. They care little for their lives. They are still children—children who will go to their death unreasoning, fighting against invincibility.

"That is something we must never overlook, for it is a fact. We cannot run amuck as giants over this world and hope to conquer it. We could conquer it, yes; but only when the last of its inhabitants had been killed; stamped out like ants defending their hill from the attacks of an elephant. Don't you see I am right?"

"Then Lylda—" began the Doctor, as the Chemist paused.

"Lylda will fail. Her venture to-day will make matters immeasurably worse."

"You're right," agreed the Big Business Man. "We should have realized."

"So you see we cannot make ourselves large and recapture Loto by force. They would anticipate us and kill him."

"Then what shall we do?" demanded the Doctor. "We must do something."

"That we must decide carefully, for we must make no more mistakes. But we can do nothing at this moment. The lives of all of us are threatened. We must not allow ourselves to become separated. We must wait here for Lylda. Reoh and Aura must stay with us. Then we can decide how to rescue Loto and what to do after that. But we must keep together."

"Jack ought to be here by now," said the Big Business Man. "I hope Reoh and Aura come with him."

For over an hour they waited, and still the Very Young Man did not come. They had just decided to send Oteo to see what had become of him and to bring down Reoh and his daughter, when Lylda unexpectedly returned. It was Eena, standing at one of the side windows, who first saw her mistress. A cry from the girl brought them all to the window. Far away beyond the city they could see the gigantic figure of Lylda, towering several hundred feet in the air.

As she came closer she seemed to stop, near the outskirts of the city, and then they saw her dwindling in size until she disappeared, hidden from their view by the houses near at hand.

In perhaps half an hour more she reappeared, picking her way carefully down the deserted street toward them. She was at this time about forty feet tall. At the corner, a hundred yards away from them a little group of people ran out, and with shouts of anger, threw something at her as she passed.

She stooped down toward them, and immediately they scurried for safety out of her reach.

Once inside of her own garden, where the Chemist and his companions were waiting, Lylda lost no time in becoming her normal size again. As she grew smaller, she sat down with her back against a little tree. Her face was white and drawn; her eyes were full of tears as she looked at her husband and his friends.

When the drug had ceased to act, the Chemist sat beside her. She had started out only a few hours before a crusader, dominant, forceful; she came back now,

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a tired, discouraged little woman. The Chemist put his arm around her protectingly, drawing her drooping body toward him. "Very bad news, Lylda, we know," he said gently.

"Oh, my husband," she cried brokenly. "So sorry I am—so very sorry. The best I knew I did. And it was all so very bad—so very bad—" she broke off abruptly, looking at him with her great, sorrowful eyes.

"Tell us, Lylda," he said softly.

"To many cities I went," she answered. "And I told the people all I meant to say. Some of them believed. But they were not many, and of the others who did not believe, they were afraid, and so they kept silent.

"Then into Orlog I went, and in the big public square I spoke—for very long—because, for some reason I know not, at first they listened.

"But no one there believed. And then, my husband, at last I knew why I could not hope to gain my way. It is not because they want Targo's rule that they oppose us. It was, but it is so no longer. It is because they have been made to fear these drugs we have. For now, in Orlog, they are shouting death to all the giants. Forgotten are all their cries for land—the things that Targo promised, and we in Arite would not give. It is death to all the giants they are shouting now; death to you, to me, to us all, because we have these drugs."

"Did they attack you?" asked the Big Business Man.

"Many things they threw," Lylda answered. "But I was so big," she smiled a little sad, twisted smile. "What they could do was as nothing. And because of that they fear and hate us so; yet never have I seen such fearless things as those they did. Death to the giants was their only cry. And I could have killed them—hundreds, thousands—yet never could I have made them stop while yet they were alive.

"I told them Targo I would free. And in Orlog they laughed. For they said that he would free himself before I had returned."

"He did," muttered the Big Business Man.

"Targo escaped this afternoon," the Chemist explained. "He went to Orlog by boat and took—" He stopped abruptly. "Come into the house, Lylda," he added gently; "there are other things, my wife, of which we must speak." He rose to his feet, pulling her up with him.

"Where is Jack?" she asked, looking at the Big Business Man, who stood watching her gravely. "And where is Loto? Does he not want to see his mother who tried so—" She put her arms around the Chemist's neck. "So very hard I tried," she finished softly. "So very hard, because—I thought—"

The Chemist led her gently into the house. The Doctor started to follow, but the Big Business Man held him back. "It is better not," he said in an undertone, "don't you think?" Oteo was standing near them, and the Big Business Man motioned to him. "Besides," he added, "I'm worried about Jack. I think we ought to go up after him. I don't think it ought to take us very long."

"With Oteo—he knows the way," agreed the Doctor. "It's devilish strange what's keeping that boy."

They found that although Oteo spoke only a few words of English, he understood nearly everything they said, and waiting only a moment more, they started up into the city toward Reoh's home.

In the living-room of the house, the Chemist sat Lylda gently down on a cushion in front of the hearth. Sitting beside her, he laid his hand on hers that rested on her knee.

"For twelve years, Lylda, we have lived together," he began slowly. "And no sorrow has come to us; no danger has threatened us or those we loved." He met his wife's questioning gaze unflinchingly.

"You have proved yourself a wonderful woman, my wife. You never knew—nor those before you—the conflict of human passions. No danger before has ever threatened you or those you loved." He saw her eyes grow wider.

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"Very strange you talk, my husband. There is something—"

"There is something, Lylda. To-day you have seen strife, anger, hate and—and death. You have met them all, calmly; you have fought them all justly, like a woman—a brave, honest Oroid woman, who can wrong no one. There is something now that I must tell you." He saw the growing fear in her eyes and hurried on.

"Loto to-day—this afternoon—"

The woman gave a little, low cry of anguish, instantly repressed. Her hand gripped his tightly.

"No, no, Lylda, not that," he said quickly, "but this afternoon, while we were all away—Loto was here alone with Eena—Targo with his men came. They did not hurt Loto; they took him away in a boat to Orlog." He stopped abruptly. Lylda's eyes never left his face. Her breath came fast; she put a hand to her mouth and stifled the cry that rose to her lips.

"They will not hurt him, Lylda; that I know. And soon we will have him back."

For a moment more her searching eyes stared steadily into his. He heard the whispered words, "My little son—with Targo," come slowly from her lips; then with a low, sobbing cry she dropped senseless into his arms.

CHAPTER XIX

AURA

THE Very Young Man involuntarily took a step backward as he met Targo's eyes, glaring at him across the old man's body. The girl in the corner gave another cry—a cry of fright and horror, yet with it a note of relief. The Very Young Man found himself wondering who she was; then he knew.

His first impulse was to leap across the room toward her. He thought of the chemicals and instinctively his hand went to his armpit. But he knew there was no time for that. He hesitated one brief instant. As he stood rigid Targo stooped swiftly and grasped the dagger in his victim's breast.

The girl screamed again, louder this time, and like a mask the Very Young Man's indecision fell from him. He stood alert, clear-headed. Here was an enemy threatening him—an enemy he must fight and overcome.

In the second that Targo bent down the Very Young Man bounded forward, and with a leap that his football days had taught him so well how to make, he landed squarely upon the bare, broad back of his antagonist. The impact of his weight forced Targo down upon the floor, and losing his balance he fell, with the Very Young Man on top of him. They hit the leg of a table as they rolled over, and something dropped from it to the floor, striking the stone surface with a thud.

The knife still stuck in the dead man's body. The Very Young Man thought he could reach it, but his opponent's great arms were around him now and held him too tightly. He tried to pull himself loose, but could not. Then he rolled partly over again, and met Targo's eyes above, leering triumphantly down at him. He looked away and wrenched his right arm free. Across the room he could see the girl still crouching in the corner. His right hand sweeping along the floor struck something heavy lying there. His fingers closed over it; he raised it up, and hardly knowing what he did, crashed it against his enemy's head.

He felt the tense muscles of the man relax, and then the weight of his inert body as it pressed down upon him. He wriggled free, and sprang to his feet. As he stood weak and trembling, looking down at the unconscious form of Targo lying upon the floor, the girl suddenly ran over and stood beside him. Her slim little body came only a little above his shoulder; instinctively he put his arm about her.

A voice, calling from outside the room, made the girl look up into his face with new terror.

"Others are coming," she whispered tensely, and huddled up against him.

The Very Young Man saw that the room had two doors—the one through which he had entered, and another in one of its other

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walls. There were no windows. He pulled the girl now toward the further door, but she held him back.

"They come that way," she whispered.

Another voice sounded behind him and the Very Young Man knew that a man was coming up along the passageway from the front entrance. Targo's men! He remembered now the skulking figure he had seen outside the house. There were more than two, for now he heard other voices, and some one calling Targo's name.

He held the girl closer and stood motionless. Like rats in a trap, he thought. He felt the fingers of his right hand holding something heavy. It was a piece of stone—the stone he had looked at through the microscope—the stone with which he had struck Targo. He smiled to himself, and slipped it into his pocket.

The girl had slowly pulled him over to the inner wall of the room. The footsteps came closer. They would be here in a moment. The Very Young Man wondered how he should fight them all; then he thought of the knife that was still in the murdered man's body. He thought he ought to get it now while there was still time. He heard a click and the wall against which he and the girl were leaning yielded with their weight. A door swung open—a door the Very Young Man had not seen before. The girl pulled him through the doorway, and swung the door softly closed behind them.

The Very Young Man found himself now in a long, narrow room with a very high ceiling. It had, apparently, no other door, and no windows. It was evidently a storeroom—piled high with what looked like boxes, and with bales of silks and other fabrics.

The Very Young Man looked around him hastily. Then he let go of the girl, and, since locks were unknown in this world, began piling as many heavy objects as possible against the door. The girl tried to help him, but he pushed her away. Once he put his ear to the door and listened. He heard voices outside in the strange Oroid tongue.

The girl stood beside him. "They are lifting Targo up. He speaks; he is not dead," she whispered.

For several minutes they stood there listening. The voices continued in a low murmur. "They'll know we are in here," said the Very Young Man finally, in an undertone. "Is there any other way out of this room?"

The girl shook her head. The Very Young Man forgot the import of her answer, and suddenly found himself thinking she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen. She was hardly more than sixteen, with a slender, not yet matured, yet perfectly rounded little body. She wore, like Lylda, a short blue silk tunic, with a golden cord crossing her breast and encircling her waist. Her raven black hair hung in two twisted locks nearly to her knees. Her skin was very white and, even more than Lylda's, gleamed with iridescent color.

"Only this one door," said the girl. The words brought the Very Young Man to himself with a start.

No other way out of the room! He knew that Targo and his men would force their way in very soon. He could not prevent them. But it would take time. The Very Young Man remembered that now he had time to take the chemicals. He put his hand to his armpit and felt the pouch that held the drug. He wondered which to take. The ceiling was very high; but to fight in the narrow confines of such a room—

HE LED the girl over to a pile of cushions and sat down beside her.

"Listen," he said briefly. "We are going to take a medicine; it will make us very small. Then we will hide from Targo and his men till they are gone. This is not magic; it is science. Do you understand?"

"I understand," the girl answered readily. "One of the strangers you are—my brother's friend."

"You will not be afraid to take the drug?"

"No." But though she spoke confidently, she drew closer to him, and shivered a little.

The Very Young Man handed her one

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of the tiny pellets. "Just touch it to the tip of your tongue as I do," he said warningly.

They took the drug. When it had ceased to act, they found themselves standing on the rough uneven stone surface that was the floor of the room. Far overhead in the dim luminous blackness they could just make out the great arching ceiling, stretching away out of sight down the length of the room. Beside them stood a tremendous shaggy pile of coarsely woven objects that were the silk pillows on which they had been sitting a moment before—pillows that seemed forty or fifty feet square now and loomed high above their heads.

The Very Young Man took the frightened girl by the hand and led her along the tremendous length of a pile of boxes, blocks long it seemed. These boxes, from their size, might have been rectangular, windowless houses, jammed closely together, and piled one upon the other up into the air almost out of sight.

Finally they came to a broad passageway between the boxes—a mere crack it would have been before. They turned into it, and, a few feet beyond, came to a larger, square space with a box making a roof over it some twenty feet above their heads.

From this retreat they could see the lower part of the door leading into the other room and could hear from beyond it a muffled roar—the voices of Targo and his men. Hardly were they hidden when the door opened a little. It struck against the bales the Very Young Man had piled against it. For a moment it held, but with the united efforts of the men pushing from the other side, it slowly yielded and swung open.

Targo stepped into the room. To the Very Young Man he seemed nearly a hundred feet high. Only his feet and ankles were visible at first from where the Very Young Man was watching. Three other men came with him. They stamped back and forth for a time, moving some of the bales and boxes. Luckily they left undisturbed those nearest the fugitives; after a moment they left, leaving the door open.

The Very Young Man breathed a long sigh of relief. "Gosh, I'm glad that's over." He spoke in a low tone, although the men in the other room seemed so far away they would hardly have heard him if he had shouted at the top of his voice.

Alone with the girl now in this great silent room, the Very Young Man felt suddenly embarrassed. "I am one of your brother's friends," he said. "My name's Jack; is yours Aura?"

"Lylda's sister I am," she answered quietly. "My father's told me about you—" Then with a rush came the memory of her father's death, which the startling experiences of the past half hour had made her forget. Her big, soft eyes filled with tears and her lips quivered. Involuntarily the Very Young Man put his arm about her again and held her close to him. She was so little and frail—so pathetic and so wholly adorable. For a long time they sat in silence; then the girl gently drew away.

At the doorway they stood and listened; Targo and his followers were still in the adjoining room, talking earnestly. "Loto they have captured," Aura whispered suddenly. "Others of Targo's men have taken him—in a boat—to Orlog. To-morrow they send a messenger to my brother to demand he give up these drugs—or Loto they will kill."

The Very Young Man waited, breathless. Suddenly he heard Targo laugh—a cruel, cynical laugh. Aura shuddered. "And when he has the drug, all of us will he kill. And all in the land, too, who will not do as he bids."

The men were rising, evidently in preparation to leave. Aura continued: "They go—now—to Orlog—all but Targo. A little way from here, up the lake shore, a boat is waiting. It will take them there fast." With a last look around, Targo and his followers disappeared through the back door of the room. An outer door clanged noisily, and the Very Young Man and Aura were left alone in the house.

Reoh murdered, Loto stolen! The Very Young Man thought of Lylda and wondered if anything could have happened

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to her. "Did they speak of your sister?" he asked.

"Targo said—he—he would put her to death," Aura answered with a shudder. "He said—she killed his brother to-day." She turned to the Very Young Man impulsively, putting her little hands up on his shoulders. "Oh, my friend," she exclaimed. "You can do something to save my family? Targo is so strong, so cruel. My father—" She stopped, and choked back a sob.

"Did they say where Lylda was now?"

"They did not know. She grew very big and went away.

"Where is your brother and my two friends?"

"Targo said they were here when he—he took Loto. Now they have gone home. He was afraid of them—now—because they have the drugs."

"Tomorrow they are going to send a messenger from Orlog to demand the drugs?"

"He said to-morrow. Oh, you will do something for us? You can save Loto?"

THE Very Young Man was beginning to formulate a plan. "And tonight," he asked, "from what they said—are you sure they will not hurt Loto?"

"They said no. But he is so little—so—" The girl burst into tears and at every sob, the Very Young Man's heart leaped in his breast. He wanted to comfort her, but he could think of no words to say; he wanted to help her—to do the best thing in what he saw was a grave crisis. What he should have done was to have taken her back to the Chemist and his friends, and then with them planned the rescue of Loto. But with the girl's hands upon his shoulders, and her sorrowful little tear-stained face looking up to his, he did not think of that. He thought only of her and her pathetic appeal. "You will do something, my friend? You can save Loto?" He could save Loto! With the power of the drugs he could do anything!

The Very Young Man made a sudden decision. "I don't know the way to Orlog; you do?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes, I know it well."

"We will go to Orlog, you and I—now, and rescue Loto. You will not be afraid?"

The girl's eyes looked into his with a clear, steady gaze. The Very Young Man stared down into their depths with his heart pounding. "I shall not be afraid, with you," said the girl softly.

The Very Young Man drew a long breath. He knew he must think it all out carefully. The drug would make them very large, and in a short time they could walk to Orlog. No harm could come to them. Once in Orlog they would find Loto, probably in Targo's palace, and bring him back with them. The Very Young Man pictured the surprise and gratification of the Chemist and his friends. Lylda would be back by then; no sooner would she have heard of Loto's loss than he would bring him back to her. Or perhaps they would meet Lylda and she would join them.

The Very Young Man produced the drug and was about to give Aura one of the pellets when another thought occurred to him. Targo would not harm Loto now because he was valuable as a hostage. But suppose he saw these two giants coming to the rescue? The Very Young Man knew that probably the boy would be killed before he could save him. That way would not do. He would have to get to Orlog unseen—rescue Loto by a sudden rush, before they could harm him.

But first it would be necessary for him and Aura to get out of Arite quietly without causing any excitement. Once in the open country they could grow larger and travel rapidly to Orlog. The Very Young Man thought it would be best to be normal size while leaving Arite. He explained his plan to Aura briefly.

It took several successive tastes of the different drugs before this result was accomplished, but in perhaps half an hour they were ready to leave the house. To the Very Young Man, this change of size was no longer even startling. Aura, this time, with him beside her, seemed quite unafraid.

"Now we're ready," said the Very

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Young Man, in a matter of fact tone that was far from indicating his true feeling. "Take the way where we are least likely to be noticed—toward Orlog. When we get in the open country we can get bigger."

He led the girl across Reoh's study. She kept her face averted as they passed the body lying on the floor, and in a moment they were outside the house. They walked rapidly, keeping close to the walls of the houses. The streets were nearly deserted and no one seemed to notice them.

The Very Young Man was calculating the time. "Probably they are just getting to Orlog with Loto," he said. "Once we get out of Arite we'll travel fast; we'll have him back in two or three hours."

Aura said nothing, but walked quietly beside him. Once or twice she looked back over her shoulder.

They were in the outskirts of the city, when suddenly the girl gripped her companion by the arm.

"Some one—behind us," she whispered. The Very Young Man resisted an impulse to look around. They had come to a cross street; the Very Young Man abruptly turned the corner, and clutching Aura by the hand ran swiftly forward a short distance. When they had slowed down to a walk again the Very Young Man looked cautiously back over his shoulder. As he did so he caught a glimpse of three men who had just reached the corner, and who darted hastily back out of sight as he turned his head.

CHAPTER XX

THE ATTACK ON THE PALACE

OTEO led the two men swiftly through the city toward Reoh's house. There were few pedestrians about and no one seemed particularly to notice them. Yet somehow, the Big Business Man thought, there hung about the city an ominous air of unrest. Perhaps it was the abnormal quiet—that solemn, sinister look of deserted streets. Or perhaps it was an occasional face peering at them from a window, or a figure lurking in a doorway and disappearing at their approach. The Big Business Man found his heart beating fast. He suddenly felt very much alone. The realization came to him that he was in a strange world, surrounded by beings of another race, most of whom, he knew now, hated and feared him and those who had come with him.

Then his thoughts took another turn. He looked up at the brilliant galaxy of stars overhead. New, unexplored worlds! Thousands, millions of them! In one tiny, little atom of a woman's wedding ring! Then he thought of his friend the Banker. Perhaps the ring had not been moved from its place in the clubroom. Then—he looked at the sky again—then Broadway—only thirty feet away from him this moment! He smiled a little at this conception, and drew a long breath—awed by his thoughts.

Oteo was plucking at his sleeve and pointing. Across the street stood Reoh's house. The Doctor knocked upon its partially opened front door, and, receiving no answer, they entered silently, with the dread sense of impending evil hanging over them. The Doctor led the way into the old man's study. At the threshold he stopped, shocked into immobility. Upon the floor, with the knife still in it, lay Reoh's body. The Doctor made a hasty examination, although the presence of the knife obviously made it unnecessary.

A hurried search of the house convinced them that Aura and the Very Young Man were not there. The two men, confused by this double disaster were at a loss to know what to do.

"They've got him," said the Big Business Man with conviction. "And the girl, too, probably. He must have come back just as they were killing Reoh."

"There wasn't much time," the Doctor said. "He was back here in ten minutes. But they've got him—you're right—or he would have been back with us before this."

"They'll take him and the girl to Orlog. They won't hurt them because they—" The Big Business Man stopped abruptly; his face went white. "Good Heavens, Frank, do you realize? They've got the drugs!"

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Targo had the drugs! The Big Business Man shuddered with fear at the thought. Their situation would be desperate, indeed, if that were so.

The Doctor reasoned it out more calmly. "I hadn't thought of that," he said slowly. "And it makes me think perhaps they have not captured Jack. If they had the drugs they would lose no time in using them. They haven't used them yet—that's evident."

The Big Business Man was about to reply when there came a shouting from the street outside, and the sound of many feet rushing past the house. They hurried to the door. A mob swept by—a mob of nearly a thousand persons. Most of them were men. Some were armed with swords; others brandished huge stones, or lengths of beaten gold implements, perhaps, with which they had been working, and which they held as weapons.

The mob ran swiftly, with vainglorious shouts from its leaders. It turned a corner nearby, and disappeared.

From every house, people appeared, and soon the streets were full of scurrying pedestrians. Most of them followed the direction taken by the mob. The listeners in the doorway could hear, from far away, the sound of shouts and cheering. And from all around them came the buzz and hum of busy streets. The city was thoroughly awake—alert and expectant.

The Big Business Man flung the door wide. "I'm going to follow that crowd. See what's going on. We can't stay here in the midst of this."

The Doctor and Oteo followed him out into the street, and they mingled with the hastening crowd. In their excitement they walked freely among the people. No one appeared to notice them, for the crowd was as excited as they, hurrying along, heedless of its immediate surroundings. As they advanced, the street became more congested.

Down another street they saw fighting going on, a weaponless crowd swaying and struggling aimlessly. A number of armed men charged this crowd; men who by their breastplates and swords the Big Business Man recognized as the police. The crowd ceased struggling and dispersed, only to gather again in another place.

The city was in a turmoil of excitement without apparent reason, or definite object. Yet there was a steady tide in the direction the first armed mob had gone, and with that tide went the Big Business Man and his two companions.

After a time they came to an open park, beyond which, on a prominence, with the lake behind, stood a large building that the Chemist had already pointed out to them as the king's palace.

Oteo led them swiftly into a side street to avoid the dense crowd around the park. Making a slight detour they came back to it again—much nearer the palace now—and approached from behind a house that fronted the open space near the palace.

"Friend of the Master—his house!" Oteo explained as he knocked peremptorily at a side door.

They waited a moment, but no one came. Oteo pushed open the door and led them within. The house was deserted, and following Oteo, they went to the roof. Here they could see perfectly what was going on around the palace, and in the park below them.

This park was nearly triangular in shape, a thousand feet possibly on each side. At the base of the triangle, on a bluff with the lake behind it, stood the palace. Its main entrance, two huge golden doors, stood at the top of a broad flight of stone steps. On these steps a fight was in progress. A mob surged up them, repulsed at the top by a score or more of men armed with swords, who were defending the doorway.

THE square was thronged with people watching the palace steps and shouting almost continuously. The fight before the palace evidently had been in progress for some time. Many dead were lying in the doorway and on the steps below it. The few defenders had so far resisted successfully against tremendous odds, for the invaders, pressed upward by those behind, could not retreat, and were being killed at

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the top from lack of space in which to fight.

"Look there," cried the Big Business Man suddenly. Coming down a cross street, marching in orderly array with its commander in front, was a company of soldier police. It came to a halt almost directly beneath the watchers on the roof-tops, and its leader brandishing his sword after a moment of hesitation, ordered these men to charge the crowd. They did not move at the order, but stood sullenly in their places. Again he ordered them forward, and as they refused to obey, made a threatening move toward them.

In sudden frenzy, those nearest leaped upon him, and in an instant he lay dead upon the ground, with half a dozen swords run through his body. Then the men stood, in formation still, apathetically watching the events that were going on around them.

Meanwhile the fight on the palace steps raged more furiously than ever. The defenders were reduced by this time to a mere handful.

"A moment more—they'll be in," said the Doctor breathlessly. Hardly had he spoken when, with a sudden, irresistible rush, the last of the guards were swept away, and the invaders surged through the doorway into the palace.

A great cry went up from the crowd in the park as the palace was taken. A cry of applause mingled with awe, for they were a little frightened at what they were seeing.

Perhaps a hundred people crowded through the doorway into the palace; the others stood outside, on the steps and on the terrace below, waiting. Hardly more than five minutes went by when a man appeared on the palace roof. He advanced to the parapet with several others standing respectfully behind him.

"Targo!" murmured Oteo.

It was Targo—Targo triumphantly standing with uplifted arms before the people he was to rule. When the din that was raised at his appearance had subsided a little he spoke; one short sentence, and then he paused. There was a moment of indecision in the crowd before it broke into tumultuous cheers.

"The king—he killed," Oteo said softly, looking at his master's friends with big, frightened eyes.

The Big Business Man stared out over the waving, cheering throng, with the huge, dominant, triumphant figure of Targo above and muttered to himself, "The king is dead; long live the king."

When he could make himself heard, Targo spoke again. The Doctor and the Big Business Man were leaning over the parapet watching the scene, when suddenly a stone flew up from the crowd beneath, and struck the railing within a few feet of where they were standing. They glanced down in surprise, and realized, from the faces that were upturned, that they were recognized. A murmur ran over the crowd directly below, and then some one raised a shout. Four words it seemed to be, repeated over and over. Gradually the shout spread —"Death to the Giants," the Big Business Man knew it was—"Death to the Giants," until the whole mass of people were calling it rhythmically, drowning out Targo's voice completely. A thousand faces stared up at the men on the roof-top and a rain of stones began falling around them.

The Doctor clutched his friend by the arm and pulled him back from the parapet. "They know us. Good Heavens, don't you see?" he said tensely. "Come on. We must get out of this. There'll be trouble." He started across the roof toward the opening that led down into the house.

The Big Business Man jerked himself free from the grasp that held him.

"I do see!" he cried a little wildly. "I do see we've been fools. There'll be trouble. You're right—there will be trouble; but it won't be ours. I'm through—through with this miserable little atom and its swarm of insects."

He gripped the Doctor by both of his shoulders. "Frank, can't you understand? We're men, you and I—men! These creatures"—he waved his arm back toward the city—"nothing but insects, infinitesimal, smaller than the smallest thing we ever

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dreamed of. And we take them seriously. Don't you understand? Seriously! That's funny, not tragic."

He fumbled at the neck of his robe, and tearing it away, brought out a vial of the drugs.

"Here," he exclaimed, and offered one of the pellets.

"Not too much," warned the Doctor, vehemently, "only touch it to your tongue."

Oteo, with pleading eyes, watched them take the drug, and the Doctor handed him a pellet, showing him how to take it.

As they stood together upon the roof-top, clinging to one another, the city dwindled away rapidly beneath them. By the time the drug had ceased to act there was hardly room for them to stand on the roof, and the house, had it not been built solidly of stone, would have been crushed under their weight. At first they felt a little dizzy, as though they were hanging in mid air, or were in a balloon, looking down at the city. Then gradually, they seemed to be of normal size again, balancing themselves awkwardly upon a little toy house whose top was hardly bigger than their feet.

The park, only a step now beneath the house-top, swarmed with tiny figures less than two inches in height. Targo still stood upon the palace roof; they could have reached down and picked him up between thumb and forefinger. The whole city lay within a radius of a few hundred feet around them. They quickly pulled themselves out of their cramped quarters.

When they had stopped increasing in size, they leaped in turn over the palace, landing upon the broad beach of the lake. Then they began walking along it. There was only room for one on the sand, and the other two, for they walked abreast, waded ankle-deep in the water. From the little city below them they could hear the hum of a myriad of tiny voices—thin, shrill, and faint. Suddenly the Big Business Man laughed. There was no hysteria in his voice now—just amusement and relief.

"And we took that seriously," he said.

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE LAKE

"YOU'RE right, we are being followed," the Very Young Man said soberly. He had pulled the girl over close against the wall of a house. "Did you see that?"

"Three, they are," Aura answered. "I saw them before—in the street below—Targo's men."

Evidently the three men had been watching the house from which they had come and had followed them from there. If they were Targo's men, as seemed very probable, the Very Young Man could not understand why they had not already attacked him. Perhaps they intended to as soon as he and Aura had reached a more secluded part of the city. They must know he had the drugs, and to gain possession of those certainly was what they were striving for. The Very Young Man realized he must take no chances; to lose the drugs would be fatal to them all.

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"Are we near the edge of the city?" he asked.

"Yes, very near."

"Then we shall get large here. If we make a run for it we will be in the country before we are big enough to attract too much attention. Understand, Aura?"

"I understand."

"We mustn't stir up the city if we can help it; with giants running around, the people would get worked up to a frenzy. You could see that with Lylda this afternoon. Not that you can blame them altogether, but we want to get Loto back before we start anything here in Arite." He took the pellets out as he spoke, and they each touched one of them to the tip of their tongues.

"Now, then, come on—not too fast, we want to keep going," said the Very Young Man, taking the girl by the hand again.

As they started off, running slowly down the street, the Very Young Man looked back. The three men were running after them—not fast, seeming content merely to keep their distance. The Very Young Man laughed. "Wait till they see us get big. Fine chance they've got."

Aura, her lithe, young body in perfect condition, ran lightly and easily as a fawn. She made a pretty picture as she ran, with her long, black hair streaming out behind her, and the short, silk tunic flapping about her lean, round thighs. She still held the Very Young Man by the hand, running just in advance of him, guiding him through the streets, which in this part of the city were more broken up and irregular.

They had not gone more than a hundred yards when the pavement began to move unsteadily under them, as the deck of a plunging ship feels to one who runs its length, and the houses they were swiftly passing began visibly to decrease in size. The Very Young Man felt the girl falter in her stride. He dropped her hand and slipped his arm about her waist, holding her other hand against it. She smiled up into his eyes, and thus they ran on, side by side.

A few moments more and they were in the open country, running on a road that wound through the hills, between cultivated fields dotted here and there with houses. The landscape dwindled beneath them steadily, until they seemed to be running along a narrow, curving path, bordered by little patches of different-colored ground, like a checkerboard. The houses they passed hardly stood as high as their knees. Sometimes peasants stood in the doorways of these houses watching them in terror. Occasionally they passed a farmer plowing his field, who stopped his work, stricken dumb, and stared at them as they went swiftly by.

When they were well out into the country, perhaps a quarter of the way to Orlog—for to beings so huge as they the distance was not great—the Very Young Man slowed down to a walk.

"How far have we gone?" he asked.

Aura stopped abruptly and looked around her. They seemed to be at the bottom of a huge, circular, shallow bowl. In every direction from where they stood the land curved upward toward the rim of the bowl that was the horizon—a line, not sharp and well defined, but dim and hazy, melting away into the blackness of the star-studded sky. Behind them, hardly more than a mile away, according to their present stature—they had stopped growing entirely now—lay the city of Arite. They could see completely across it and out into the country beyond.

The lake, with whose shore they had been running parallel, was much closer to them. Ahead, up near the rim of the horizon, lay a black smudge. Aura pointed. "Orlog is there," she said. "You see it?"

To the Very Young Man suddenly came the realization that already he was facing the problem of how to get into Orlog unheralded. If they remained in their present size they could easily walk there in an hour or less. But long before that they would be seen and recognized.

The Very Young Man feared for Loto's safety if he allowed that to happen. He seemed to be able to make out the city of Orlog now. It was smaller than Arite,

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and lay partially behind a hill, with most of its houses strung along the lake shore. If only they were not so tall they could not be seen so readily. But if they became smaller it would take them much longer to get there. And eventually they would have to become normal Oroid size, or even smaller, in order to get into the city unnoticed. The Very Young Man thought of the lake. Perhaps that would be the best way.

"Can you swim?" he asked. And Aura, with her ready smile, answered that she could.

"If we are in the water," she added, seeming to have followed his thoughts, "they would not see us. I can swim very far. Can you?"

The Very Young Man nodded.

"If we could get near to Orlog in the water," he said, "we might get a boat. And then when we were small, we could sail up. They wouldn't see us then."

"There are many boats," answered the girl in agreement. "Look!"

There were, indeed, on the lake, within sight of them, several boats. "We must get the one nearest Orlog," the Very Young Man said. "Or else it will beat us in and carry the news."

IN A few minutes more they were at the lake shore. The Very Young Man wore, underneath his robe, a close-fitting knitted garment very much like a bathing-suit. He took off his robe, and rolling it up, tied it across his back with the cord he had worn around his waist. Aura's tunic was too short to impede her swimming, and when the Very Young Man was ready, they waded out into the water together. They found the lake no deeper than to Aura's shoulders, but as it was easier to swim than to wade, they began swimming—away from shore toward the farthest boat that evidently was headed for Orlog.

The Very Young Man thought with satisfaction that, with only their heads visible, huge as they would appear, they could probably reach this boat without being seen by any one in Orlog. The boat was perhaps a quarter of a mile from them—a tiny little toy vessel, it seemed, that they never would have seen except for its sail.

They came up to it rapidly, for they were swimming very much faster than it would sail, passing close to one of the others and nearly swamping it by the waves they made. As they neared the boat they were pursuing—it was different from any the Very Young Man had seen so far, a single, canoe-shaped hull, with out-riders on both sides—they could see it held but a single occupant, a man who sat in its stern—a figure about as long as one of the Very Young Man's fingers.

The Very Young Man and Aura were swimming side by side. The water was perfect in temperature—neither too hot nor too cold; they had not been swimming fast, and were not winded.

"We've got him; what'll we do with him?" the Very Young Man wanted to know in dismay, as the thought occurred to him. He might have been more puzzled at how to take the drug to make them smaller while they were swimming, but Aura's answer solved both problems.

"There is an island," she said, flinging an arm up out of the water. "We can push the boat to it, and him we can leave there. Is that not the thing to do?"

"You bet your life," the Very Young Man agreed, enthusiastically. "That's just the thing to do."

As they came within reach of the boat the Very Young Man stopped swimming and found that the water was not much deeper than his waist. The man in the boat appeared about to throw himself into the lake from fright.

"Tell him, Aura," the Very Young Man said. "We won't hurt him."

Wading through the water, they pushed the boat with its terrified occupant carefully in front of them toward the island, which was not more than two or three hundred yards away. The Very Young Man found this rather slow work; becoming impatient, he seized the boat in his hand, pinning the man against its seat with his forefinger so he would not fall out. Then

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raising the boat out of the water over his head, he waded forward much more rapidly.

The island, which they reached in a few moments more, was circular in shape, and about fifty feet in diameter. It had a beach entirely around it; a hill perhaps ten feet high rose near its center, and at one end it was heavily wooded. There were no houses to be seen.

The Very Young Man set the boat back on the water, and they pushed it up on the beach. When it grounded the tiny man leaped out and ran swiftly along the sand. The Very Young Man and Aura laughed heartily as they stood ankle-deep in the water beside the boat, watching him. For nearly five minutes he ran; then suddenly he ducked inland and disappeared in the woods.

When they were left alone they lost no time in becoming normal Oroid size. The boat appeared about twenty-five feet long —a narrow, canoe-shaped hull hollowed out of a tree trunk. They climbed into it, and with a long pole they found lying in its bottom, the Very Young Man shoved it off the beach.

CHAPTER XXII

WORD MUSIC

THE boat had a mast stepped near the bow, and a triangular cloth sail. The Very Young Man sat in the stern, steering with a short, broad-bladed paddle; Aura lay on a pile of rushes in the bottom of the boat, looking up at him.

For about half a mile the Very Young Man sailed along parallel with the beach, looking for the man they had marooned. He was nowhere in sight, and they finally headed out into the lake toward Orlog, which they could just see dimly on the further shore.

The breeze was fresh, and they made good time. The boat steered easily, and the Very Young Man, reclining on one elbow, with Aura at his feet, felt at peace with himself and with the world. Again he thought this girl the prettiest he had ever seen. There was something, too, of a spiritual quality in the delicate smallness of her features—a sweetness of expression in her quick, understanding smile, and an honest clearness in her steady gaze that somehow he seemed never to have seen in a girl's face before.

He felt again, now that he had time to think more of her, that same odd diffidence that had come to him before when they were alone in the storeroom of her home. That she did not share this feeling was obvious from the frankness and ease of her manner.

For some time after leaving the island neither spoke. The Very Young Man felt the girl's eyes fixed almost constantly upon him—a calm gaze that held it in a great curiosity and wonderment. He steered steadily onward toward Orlog. There was, for the moment, nothing to discuss concerning their adventure, and he wondered what he should say to this girl who stared at him so frankly. Then he met her eyes, and again she smiled, with that perfect sense of comradeship he had so seldom felt with women of his own race.

"You're very beautiful," said the Very Young Man abruptly.

The girl's eyes widened a little, but she did not drop her lashes. "I want to be beautiful; if you think it is so, I am very glad."

"I do. I think you're the prettiest girl I ever saw." He blurted out the words impetuously. He was very earnest, very sincere, and very young.

A trace of coquetry came into the girl's manner. "Prettier than the girls of your world? Are they not pretty?"

"Oh, yes—of course; but—"

"What?" she asked when he paused.

The Very Young Man considered a moment. "You're—you're different," he said finally. She waited. "You—you don't know how to flirt, for one thing."

The girl turned her head away and looked at him a little sidewise through lowered lashes.

"How do you know that?" she asked demurely; and the Very Young Man admitted to himself with a shock of surprise

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that he certainly was totally wrong in that deduction at least.

"Tell me of the girls in your world," she went on after a moment's silence. "My sister's husband many times he has told me of the wonderful things up there in that great land. But more I would like to hear."

He told her, with an eloquence and enthusiasm born of youth, about his own life and those of his people. She questioned eagerly and with an intelligence that surprised him, for she knew far more of the subject than he realized.

"These girls of your country," she interrupted him once. "They, too, are very beautiful; they wear fine clothes—I know—my brother he has told me."

"Yes," said the Very Young Man.

"And are they very learned—very clever—do they work and govern, like the men?"

"Some are very learned. And they are beginning to govern, like the men; but not so much as you do here."

The girl's forehead wrinkled. "My brother he once told me," she said slowly, "that in your world many women are bad. Is that so?"

"Some are, of course. And some men think that most are. But I don't; I think women are splendid."

"If that is so, then better I can understand what I have heard," the girl answered thoughtfully. "If Oroid women were as I have heard my brother talk of some of yours, this world of ours would soon be full of evil."

"You are different," the Very Young Man said quickly. "You—and Lylda."

"The women here, they have kept the evil out of life," the girl went on. "It is their duty, their responsibility to their race. Your good women, they have not always governed as we have. Why is that?"

"I do not know," the Very Young Man admitted. "Except because the men would not let them."

"Why not, if they are just as learned as the men?" The girl was smiling—a little roguish, twisted smile.

"There are very clever girls," the Very Young Man went on hastily; he found himself a little on the defensive, and he did not know just why. "They are able to do things in the world. But—many men do not like them."

Aura was smiling openly now, and her eyes twinkled with mischief. "Perhaps it is the men are jealous. Could that not be so?"

The Very Young Man did not answer, and the girl went on more seriously. "The women of my race, they are very just. Perhaps you know that, Jack. Often has my brother told us of his own great world and of its problems. And the many things he has told us— Lylda and I— we have often wondered. For every question has its other side, and we cannot judge—from him alone."

THE Very Young Man, surprised at the turn their conversation had taken, and confused a little by this calm logic from a girl—particularly from so young and pretty a girl—was at a loss how to go on.

"You cannot understand, Aura," he finally said seriously. "Women may be all kinds; some are bad, some are good. Down here I know it is not that way. Sometimes when a girl is smart she thinks she is smarter than any man living. You would not like that sort of girl, would you?"

"My brother never said it just that way," she answered with equal seriousness. "No, that would be bad. Very bad. In our land women they are only different from men. They know they are not better or worse."

The Very Young Man was thinking of a girl he once knew. "I hate clever girls," he blurted out.

Aura's eyes were teasing him again. "I am so sorry," she said sadly.

The Very Young Man looked his surprise. "Why are you sorry?"

"My sister, she once told me I was clever. My brother said it, too, and I believed them."

The Very Young Man flushed.

"You're different," he repeated.

"How—different?" She was looking at him sidewise again.

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"I don't know; I've been trying to think—but you are. And I don't hate you. I like you very, very much."

"I like you, too," she answered frankly, and the Very Young Man thought of Loto as she said it. He was leaning down toward her, and their hands met for an instant.

The Very Young Man had spread his robe out to dry when he first got into the boat, and he put it on while Aura steered. Then he sat beside her on the seat, taking the paddle again.

"Do you go often to the theater?" she asked after a time.

"Oh, yes, often."

"Nothing like that do we have here," she added, a little wistfully. "Only once when we played a game in the field beyond my brother's home. Lylda was the queen and her lady. And do you go to the opera, too? My brother he had told me of the opera. How wonderful must that be! So beautiful—more beautiful even it must be than Lylda's music. But never shall it be for me." She smiled sadly. "Never shall I be able to hear it."

An eager contradiction sprang to the Very Young Man's lips, but the girl shook her head quietly.

For several minutes they did not speak. The wind behind them blew the girl's long hair forward over her shoulders. A lock of it fell upon the Very Young Man's hand as it lay on the seat between them, and unseen he twisted it about his fingers. The wind against his neck felt warm and pleasant; the murmur of the water flowing past sounded low and sweet and soothing. Overhead the stars hung very big and bright. It was like sailing on a perfect night in his own world. He was very conscious of the girl's nearness; the softness of her hair about his fingers made him thrill. And all at once he found himself quoting some half-forgotten lines:

"If I were king, ah, love! If I were king
What tributary nations I would bring
To bow before your sceptre and to swear
Allegiance to your lips and eyes and hair."

Aura's questioning glance of surprise brought him to himself. "That is so pretty. What is that?" she asked eagerly. "Never have I heard one speak like that before."

"Why, that's poetry; haven't you ever heard any poetry?"

The girl shook her head. "It's just like music. It sings. Do it again."

The Very Young Man suddenly felt very self-conscious.

"Do it again, please." She looked pleadingly up into his face and the Very Young Man went on:

"Beneath your feet what treasures I would fling!
The stars would be your pearls upon a string;
The world a ruby for your finger-ring;
And you could have the sun and moon to wear
If I were king."

The girl clapped her hands artlessly. "Oh, that is so pretty! Never did I know that words could sound like that. Say it some more, please."

And the Very Young Man, sitting under the stars beside this beautiful little creature of another world searched into his memory and for her who never before had known that words could rhyme, opened up the realm of poetry.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PALACE OF ORLOG

ENGROSSED with each other the Very Young Man and Aura sailed close up to the water-front of Orlog before they remembered their situation. It was the Very Young Man who first became aware of the danger. Without explanation he suddenly pulled Aura into the bottom of the boat, leaving it to flutter up into the wind unguided.

"They might see us from here," he said hurriedly. "We must decide what is best for us to do."

They were then less than a quarter of a mile from the stone quay that marked the city's principal landing-place. Nearer to them was a broad, sandy beach behind

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which, in a long string along the lake shore, lay the city. Its houses were not unlike those of Arite, although most of them were rather smaller and less pretentious. On a rise of ground just beyond the beach, and nearly in front of them, stood an elaborate building that was Targo's palace.

"We daren't go much closer," the Very Young Man said. "They'd recognize us."

"You they would know for one of the strangers," said Aura. "But if I should steer and you were hidden no one would notice."

The Very Young Man realized the difficulty. "We've got to be very small when we go into the city."

"How small would you think?" asked Aura.

The Very Young Man held his hands about a foot apart. "You see, the trouble is, we must be small enough to get around without too much danger of being seen; but if we get too small it would be a terrible walk up there to Targo's palace."

"We cannot sail this boat if we are such a size," Aura declared. "Too large it would be for us to steer."

"That's just it, but we can't go any closer this way."

Aura thought a moment. "If you lie there"—she indicated the bottom of the boat under a forward seat—"no one can see. And I will steer—there to the beach ahead; me they will not notice. Then at the beach we will take the drug."

"We've got to take a chance," said the Very Young Man. "Some one may come along and see us getting small."

They talked it over very carefully for some time. Finally they decided to follow Aura's plan and run the boat to the beach under her guidance; then to take the drug. There were few people around the lake front at this hour; the beach itself, as far as they could see, was entirely deserted, and the danger of discovery seemed slight. Aura pointed out, however, that once on shore, if their stature were so great as a foot they would be even more conspicuous than when of normal size, even allowing for the strangeness of the Very Young Man's appearance. The Very Young Man made a calculation and reached the conclusion that with a height of six or seven inches they would have to walk about a mile from the landing-place to reach Targo's palace. They decided to become as near that size as they conveniently could.

When both fully understood what they intended to do, the Very Young Man gave Aura one of the pellets of the drug and lay down in the bow of the boat. Without a word the girl took her seat in the stern and steered for the beach. When they were close inshore Aura signaled her companion and at the same moment both took the drug. Then she left her seat and lay down beside the Very Young Man. The boat, from the momentum it had gained, floated inshore and grounded gently on the beach.

As they lay there, the Very Young Man could see the sides of the boat growing up steadily above their heads. The gunwale was nearly six feet above them before he realized a new danger. Scrambling to his feet he pulled the girl up with him; even when standing upright their heads came below the sides of the vessel.

"We've got to get out right now," the Very Young Man said in an excited whisper. "We'd be too small." He led the girl hastily into the bow and with a running leap clambered up and sat astride the gunwale. Then, reaching down he pulled Aura up beside him.

In a moment more they had dropped overboard up to their shoulders in the water. High overhead loomed the hull of the boat—a large sailing vessel it seemed to them now. They started wading toward shore immediately, but, because they were so rapidly diminishing in size, it was nearly five minutes before they could get there.

Once on shore they lay prone upon the sand, waiting for the drug to cease its action. When, by proper administering of both the chemicals, they had reached approximately their predetermined stature, which, in itself, required considerable calculation on the Very Young Man's part, they stood up near the water's edge and looked about them.

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The beach to them now, with its great, coarse-grained sand, seemed nearly a quarter of a mile wide; in length it extended as far as they could see in both directions. Beyond the beach, directly in front of them on a hill perhaps a thousand feet above the lake level, and about a mile or more away, stood Targo's palace. To the Very Young Man it looked far larger than any building he had ever seen.

The boat in which they had landed lay on the water with its bow on the beach beside them. It was now a vessel some two hundred and fifty feet in length, with sides twenty feet high and a mast towering over a hundred feet in the air.

There was no one in sight from where they stood. "Come on, Aura," said the Very Young Man, and started off across the beach toward the hill.

It was a long walk through the heavy sand to the foot of the hill. When they arrived they found themselves at the beginning of a broad stone roadway—only a path to those of normal Oroid size—that wound back and forth up the hill to the palace. They walked up this road, and as they progressed, saw that it was laid through a grassy lawn that covered the entire hillside—a lawn with gray-blue blades of grass half as high as their bodies.

AFTER walking about ten minutes they came to a short flight of steps. Each step was twice as high as their heads—impossible of ascent, so they made a detour through the grass.

Suddenly Aura clutched the Very Young Man by the arm with a whispered exclamation, and they both dropped to the ground. A man was coming down the roadway; he was just above the steps when they first saw him—a man so tall that, standing beside him, they would have reached hardly above his ankles. The long grass in which they were lying hid them effectually from his sight and he passed them by unnoticed. When he was gone the Very Young Man drew a long breath. "We must watch that," he said apprehensively. "If anyone sees us it's all off."

It took the two adventurers over an hour to get safely up the hill and into the palace. Its main entrance, approached by a long flight of steps, was an impossible means of ingress, but Aura fortunately knew of a smaller door at the side which led into the basement of the building. This door they found slightly ajar. It was open so little, however, that they could not get past, and as they were not strong enough even with their combined efforts, to swing the door open, they were again halted.

"We'd better get still smaller," the Very Young Man whispered somewhat nervously. "There's less danger that way."

They reduced their size, perhaps one half, and when that was accomplished the crack in the door had widened sufficiently to let them in. Within the building they found themselves in a hallway several hundred feet wide and half a mile or more in length—its ceiling high as the roof of some great auditorium. The Very Young Man looked about in dismay. "Great Scott," he ejaculated, "this won't do at all."

"Many times I have been here," said Aura. "It looks so very different now, but I think I know the way."

"That may be," agreed the Very Young Man dubiously, "but we'd have to walk miles if we stay as small as this."

A heavy tread sounded far away in the distance. The Very Young Man and Aura shrank back against the wall, close by the door. In a moment a man's feet and the lower part of his legs came into view. He stopped by the door, pulling it inward. The Very Young Man looked up into the air; a hundred and fifty feet, perhaps, above their heads he saw the man's face looking out through the doorway.

In a moment another man joined him, coming from outside, and they spoke together for a time. Their roaring voices, coming down from this great height, were nevertheless distinctly audible.

"In the audience room," Aura whispered, after listening an instant, "Targo's younger brother talks with his counsellors. Big things they are planning." The Very Young Man did not answer; the two men con-

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tinued their brief conversation and parted.

When the Very Young Man and Aura were left alone, he turned to the girl eagerly. "Did they mention Loto? Is he here?"

"Of him they did not speak," Aura answered. "It is best that we go to the audience room, where they are talking. Then, perhaps, we will know." The Very Young Man agreed, and they started off.

For nearly half an hour they trudged onward along this seemingly endless hallway. Then again they were confronted with a flight of steps—this time steps that were each more than three times their own height.

"We've got to chance it," said the Very Young Man, and after listening carefully and hearing no one about, they again took the drug, making themselves sufficiently large to ascend these steps to the upper story of the building.

IT WAS nearly an hour before the two intruders, after several narrow escapes from discovery, and by alternating doses of both the drugs, succeeded in getting into the room where Targo's brother and his advisors were in conference.

They entered through the open door—a doorway so wide that a hundred like them could have marched through it abreast. A thousand feet away across the vastness of the room they could see Targo's brother and ten of his men—sitting on mats upon the floor, talking earnestly. Before them stood a stone bench on which were a number of golden goblets and plates of food.

The adventurers ran swiftly down the length of the room, following its wall. It echoed with their footfalls, but they knew that this sound, so loud to their ears, would be inaudible to the huge figures they were approaching.

"They won't see us," whispered the Very Young Man, "let's get up close." And in a few moments more they were standing beside one of the figures, sheltered from sight by a corner of the mat upon which the man was sitting. His foot, bent sidewise under him upon the floor, was almost within reach of the Very Young Man's hand. The fiber thong that fastened its sandal looked like a huge rope thick as the Very Young Man's ankle, and each of its toes were half as long as his entire body.

Targo's brother, a younger man than those with him, appeared to be doing most of the talking. He it was beside whom Aura and the Very Young Man were standing.

"You tell me if they mention Loto," whispered the Very Young Man. Aura nodded and they stood silent, listening.

The men all appeared deeply engrossed with what their leader was saying. The Very Young Man, watching his companion's face, saw an expression of concern and fear upon it. She leaned toward him.

"In Arite, to-night," she whispered, "Targo is organizing men to attack the palace of the King. Him will they kill—then Targo will be proclaimed leader of all the Oroid nation."

"We must get back," the Very Young Man answered in an anxious whisper. "I wish we knew where Loto was; haven't they mentioned him, or any of us?"

Aura did not reply, and the Very Young Man waited silent. Once one of the men laughed, a laugh that drifted out into the immense distances of the room in great waves of sound. Aura gripped her companion by the arm.

"Then when Targo rules the land, they will send a messenger to my brother. Him they will tell that the drugs must be given to Targo, or Loto will be killed—wait—when they have the drugs," Aura translated in a swift, tense whisper, "then all of us they will kill." She shuddered. "And with the drugs they will rule as they desire, for evil."

"They'll never get them," the Very Young Man muttered.

Targo's brother leaned forward and raised a goblet from the table. The movement of his foot upon the floor made the two eaves-droppers jump aside to avoid being struck.

Again Aura grasped her companion by

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the arm. "He is saying Loto is up-stairs," she whispered after a moment. "I know where."

"I knew it," said the Very Young Man exultingly. "You take us there. Come on—let's get out of here—we mustn't waste a minute."

They started back toward the wall nearest them—some fifty feet away—and following along its edge, ran down toward the doorway through which they had entered the room. They were still perhaps a hundred yards away from it, running swiftly, when there appeared in the doorway the feet and legs of two men who were coming in. The Very Young Man and Aura stopped abruptly, shrinking up against the side of the wall. Then there came a heavy metallic clanging sound; the two men entered the room, closing the door behind them!

CHAPTER XXIV

AN ANT-HILL OUTRAGED

"WE'LL have to get smaller," said the Doctor. "There's Rogers's house."

They had been walking along the beach from the King's palace hardly more than a hundred yards. The Doctor and the Big Business Man were in front, and Oteo, wide-eyed and solemn, was close behind them.

The Doctor was pointing down at the ground a few feet ahead. There, at a height just above their ankles, stood the Chemist's house—a little building whose roof did not reach more than half-way to their knees, even though it stood on higher ground than the beach upon which they were walking. On the roof they could see two tiny figures, the Chemist and Lylda, waving their arms.

The Big Business Man stopped short. "Now see here, Frank, let's understand this. We've been fooling with this thing too long. We've made a mess of it—you know that." He spoke determinedly. The Doctor did not answer.

"We got here—yesterday. We found a peaceful world. Dissatisfaction in it, yes. But certainly a more peaceful world than the one we left. We've been here one day—one day, Frank, and now look at things. This child, Loto—stolen. Jack disappeared. Goodness knows what's happened to him. A revolution, the whole place in an uproar. All in one day, since we took our place in this world and tried to mix up in its affairs.

"It's time to call a halt, Frank. If only we can get Jack back. That's the bad part. We've got to find Jack. And then get out; we don't belong here anyway. It's nothing to us. Why, man, look at it." He waved his arm out over the city. In the street beside them they could see a number of little figures no bigger than their fingers, staring up into the air. "What is all that to us now, as we stand here? Nothing. Nothing but a kid's toy; with little animated manikins for a child to play with."

"We've got to find Jack," said the Doctor.

"Certainly we have, and then get out. We're only hurting these little creatures, anyway, by being here."

"But there's Rogers and Lylda," added the Doctor. "And Loto and Lylda's sister."

"Take them with us. They'll have to go. They can't stay here now. But we must find Jack; that's the main thing."

"Look," the Doctor said, moving forward. "They're shouting to us."

They walked up and bent over the Chemist's house. Their friend was making a funnel of his hands and trying to attract their attention. The Big Business Man knelt upon the beach and put his head down beside the house. "Make yourselves smaller," he heard the Chemist shouting in a shrill little voice.

"We think it best not to. You must come up to us. Serious things have happened. Take the drug now; then we'll tell you." The Big Business Man, with his knees upon the beach, had one hand on the sand and the other at the gate of Lylda's garden. His face was just above the roof-top.

The two little figures consulted a moment; then the Chemist shouted up, "All right; wait," and he and Lylda disappeared

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into the house. A moment afterward they reappeared in the garden; Eena was with them. They crossed the garden and turned into the street toward the flight of steps that led down to the lake.

The Big Business Man had regained his feet and was standing ankle-deep in the water talking to the Doctor when Oteo suddenly plucked at his sleeve.

"The Master—" he cried. The youth was staring down into the street, with a look of terror on his face. The Big Business Man followed the direction of his glance; at the head of the steps a number of men had rushed upon the Chemist and the two women, and were dragging them back up the hill. The Big Business Man hesitated only a moment; then he reached down and plucking a little figure from one of the struggling groups, flung it back over his shoulder into the lake.

The other assailants did not run, as he had expected, so he gently pried them apart with his fingers from their captives, and, one by one, flung them into the air behind him. One who struck Lylda, he squashed upon the flagstones of the street with his thumb.

Only one escaped. He had been holding Eena; when he saw he was the last, he suddenly dropped his captive and ran shrieking up the hill into the city.

The Big Business Man laughed grimly, and got upon his feet a little unsteadily.

"You see, Frank," he said, and his voice trembled a little. "Good Heavens, suppose we had been that size, too!"

In a few moments more the Chemist, Lylda and Eena had taken the drug and were as large as the others. All six stood in the water beside the Chemist's house. The Chemist had not spoken while he was growing; now he greeted his friends quietly. "A close call, gentlemen. I thank you." He smiled approvingly at the Big Business Man.

Eena and Oteo stood apart from the others. The girl was obviously terror-stricken by the experiences she had undergone. Oteo put his arm across her shoulders, and spoke to her reassuringly.

"Where is Jack?" Lylda asked anxiously. "And my father—and Aura?" The Big Business Man thought her face looked years older than when he had last seen it. Her expression was set and stern, but her eyes stared into his with a gentle, sorrowful gaze that belied the sternness of her lips.

They told her, as gently as they could, of the death of her father and the disappearance of the Very Young Man, presumably with Aura. She bore up bravely under the news of her father's death, standing with her hand on her husband's arm, and her sorrowful eyes fixed upon the face of the Big Business Man who haltingly told what had befallen them. When he came to a description of the attack on the palace, the death of the King, and the triumph of Targo, the Chemist raised his hands with a hopeless gesture.

The Doctor put in: "It's a serious situation—most serious."

"There's only one thing we can do," the Big Business Man added quickly. "We must find Jack and your sister." He addressed Lylda, whose eyes had never left his face. "And then get out of this world as quickly as we can, before we do it any more harm."

THE Chemist began pacing up and down the strip of the beach. He had evidently reached the same conclusion—that it was hopeless to continue longer to cope with so desperate a situation. But he could not bring himself so easily to a realization that his life in this world, of which he had been so long virtually the leader, was at an end. He strode back and forth thinking deeply; the water that he kicked idly splashed up sometimes over the houses of the tiny city at his side.

The Big Business Man went on, "It's the only way. The best way for all of us and for this little world, too."

"The best way for you, and you." Lylda spoke softly and with a sweet, gentle sadness that the Big Business Man never had heard before in a woman's voice. "It is best for you, my friends. But for me—"

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She shook her head.

The Big Business Man laid his hands gently on her shoulders. "Best for you, too, little woman. And for these people you love so well. Believe me, it is."

The Chemist paused in his walk. "Probably Aura and Jack are together. No harm has come to them so far—that's certain. If his situation were desperate he would have made himself as large as we are and we would see him."

"If he got the chance," the Doctor murmured.

"Certainly he has not been killed or captured," the Chemist reasoned, "for we would have other giants to face immediately that happened."

"Perhaps he took the girl with him and started off to Orlog to find Loto," suggested the Doctor. "That crazy boy might do anything."

"He should be back by now, even if he had," said the Big Business Man. "I don't see how anything could happen to him—having those—" He stopped abruptly.

While they had been talking a crowd of little people had gathered in the city beside them, a crowd that thronged the street before the Chemist's house, filled the open space across from it and overflowed down the steps leading to the beach. It was uncanny, standing there, to see these swarming little creatures, like ants whose hill had been desecrated by the foot of some stray passerby. They were enraged, and with an ant's unreasoning, desperate courage they were ready to fight and to die, against an enemy irresistibly strong.

"Just look at them," murmured the Big Business Man in awe.

The steps leading to the beach were black with them now—a swaying, struggling mass of little human forms, men and women, hardly a finger's length in height, coming down in a steady stream and swarming out upon the beach. In a few moments the sand was black with them, and always more appeared in the city above to take their places.

The Big Business Man felt a sharp sting in his foot above the sandal. One of the tiny figures was clinging to its string and sticking a sword into his flesh. Involuntarily he kicked; a hundred of the little creatures were swept aside, and when he put his foot back upon the sand he could feel them mash under his tread. Their faint, shrill, squeaking shrieks had a ghostly semblance to human voices, and he turned suddenly sick and faint.

Then he glanced at Lylda's face; it bore an expression of sorrow and of horror that made him shudder. To him at first these had been savage, vicious little insects, annoying, but harmless enough if one kept upon one's feet. But to her, he knew, they were men and women—misguided, frenzied—but human, thinking beings like herself. And he found himself wondering, vaguely, what he should do to repel them.

The attack was so unexpected, and came so quickly that the giants had stood motionless, watching it with awe. Before they realized their situation the sand was so crowded with the struggling little figures that none of them could stir without trampling upon scores.

Oteo and Eena, standing ankle-deep in the water were unattacked, and at a word from the Chemist the others joined them, leaving little heaps of mangled human forms upon the beach where they had trod.

All except Lylda. She stood her ground, her face bloodless, her eyes filled with tears. Her feet were covered now; her ankles bleeding from a dozen tiny knives hacking at her flesh. The Chemist called her to him, but she only raised her arms with a gesture of appeal.

"Oh, my husband," she cried. "Please, I must. Let me take the drug now and grow small, like them. Then will they see we mean them no harm. And I shall tell them we are their friends—and you, the Master, mean only good—"

The Big Business Man started forward. "They'll kill her!"

But the Chemist held them back.

"Not now, Lylda," he said gently. "Not now. Don't you see? There's nothing you can do; it's too late now." He met her gaze unyielding. For a moment she stared;

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then her figure swayed and with a low sob she dropped in a heap upon the sand.

As Lylda fell, the Chemist leaped forward, the other three men at his side. A strident cry came up from the swarming multitude, and in an instant hundreds of them were upon her, climbing over her and thrusting their swords into her body.

The Chemist and the Big Business Man picked her up and carried her into the water, brushing off the fighting little figures that still clung to her. There they laid her down, her head supported by Eena, who knelt in the water beside her mistress.

The multitude on the sand crowded up to the water's edge; hundreds, forced forward by the pressure of those behind, plunged in, swam about, or sank and were rolled back by the surf, lifeless upon the shore. The beach crawled with their struggling forms, only the spot where Lylda had fallen was black and still.

"She's all right," said the Doctor after a moment, bending over Lylda. A cry from Oteo made him straighten up quickly. Out over the horizon, toward Orlog, there appeared the dim shape of a gigantic human form, and behind it others, faint and blurred against the stars!

CHAPTER XXV

THE RESCUE OF LOTO

THE Very Young Man heard the clang of the closing door with sinking heart. The two newcomers, passing close to him and Aura as they stood shrinking up against the wall, joined their friends at the table. The Very Young Man turned to Aura with a solemn face.

"Are there any other doors?" he asked.

The girl pointed. "One other, there—but see, it, too, is closed."

Far across the room the Very Young Man could make out a heavy metal door similar to that through which they had entered. It was closed—he could see that plainly. And to open it—so huge a door that its great golden handle hung nearly a hundred feet above them—was an utter impossibility.

The Very Young Man looked at the windows. There were four of them, all on one side of the room. Enormous curtained apertures, two hundred feet in length and half as broad. But none came even within fifty feet of the floor. The Very Young Man realized with dismay that there was apparently no way of escape out of the room.

"We can't get out, Aura," he said, and in spite of him his voice trembled. "There's no way."

The girl had no answer but a quiet nod of agreement. Her face was serious, but there was on it no sign of panic. The Very Young Man hesitated a moment; then he started off down the room toward one of the doors, with Aura close at his side.

They could not get out in their present size, he knew. Nor would they dare make themselves sufficiently large to open the door, or climb through one of the windows, even if the room had been nearer the ground than it actually was. Long before they could escape they would be discovered and seized.

The Very Young Man tried to think it out clearly. He knew, except for a possible accident, or a miscalculation on his part, that they were in no real danger. But he did not want to make a false move, and for the first time he realized his responsibility to Aura, and began to regret the rashness of his undertaking.

They could wait, of course, until the conference was over, and then slip out unnoticed. But the Very Young Man felt that the chances of their rescuing Loto were greater now than they would be probably at any time in the future. They must get out right away; he was convinced of that. But how?

They were at the door in a moment more. Standing so close, it seemed a tremendous shaggy walling of shining metal. They walked its length, and then suddenly the Very Young Man had an idea. He threw himself face down upon the floor. Underneath its lower edge there was a tiny crack. To one of normal Oroid size it would have been unnoticeable, a space hardly so great

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as the thickness of a thin sheet of paper. But the Very Young Man could see it plainly; he gaged its size by slipping the edge of his robe into it.

This crack was formed by the bottom of the door and the level surface of the floor; there was no sill. The door was perfectly hung, for the crack seemed to be of uniform size. The Very Young Man showed it to Aura.

"There's the way out," he whispered. "Through there and then large again on the other side."

He made his calculation of size carefully, and then, crushing one of the pills into powder, divided a portion of it between himself and the girl. Aura seemed tired and the drug made her very dizzy. They both sat upon the stone floor, close up to the door, and closed their eyes. When, by the feeling of the floor beneath them, they knew the action of the drug was over, they stood up unsteadily and looked around them.

They found themselves standing upon a great stone plain. The ground beneath their feet was rough, but as far away as they could see, out up to the horizon, it was mathematically level. This great expanse was empty except in one place; over to the right there appeared a huge, irregular, blurred mass that might have been, by its look, a range of mountains. But the mass moved as they stared at it, and the Very Young Man knew it was the nearest one of Targo's men, sitting beside the table.

In the opposite direction, perhaps a hundred yards away from where they were standing, they could see the bottom of the door. It hung in the air some fifty feet above the surface of the ground. They walked over and stood underneath; like a great roof it spread over them—a flat, level surface parallel with the floor beneath.

At this extraordinary change in their surroundings Aura seemed frightened, but seeing the matter of fact way in which her companion acted, she maintained her composure and soon was much interested in this new aspect of things. The Very Young Man took a last careful look around and then, holding Aura by the hand, started to cross under the door in a direction he judged to be at right angles to its length.

They walked swiftly, trying to keep their sense of direction, but having no means of knowing whether they were doing so or not. For perhaps ten minutes they walked; then they emerged on the other side of the door and again faced a great level, empty expanse.

"We're under," the Very Young Man remarked with relief. "Do you know where Loto is from here?"

Aura had recovered her self-possession sufficiently to smile.

"I might, perhaps," she answered, with a pretty little shrug. "But it's a long way, don't you think? A hundred miles, it may be?"

"We get large here," said the Very Young Man, with an answering smile. He was greatly relieved to be outside the audience room; the way seemed easy before them now.

They took the opposite drug, and after several successive changes of size, succeeded in locating the upper room in the palace in which Loto was held. At this time they were about the same relative size to their enemies as when they entered the audience chamber on the floor below.

"That must be it," the Very Young Man remarked, as they cautiously turned a hallway corner. A short distance beyond, in front of a closed door, sat two guards.

"That is the room of which they spoke," Aura answered. "Only one door there is, I think."

"That's all right," said the Very Young Man confidently. "We'll do the same thing—go under the door."

THEY went close up to the guards, who were sitting upon the floor playing some sort of a game with little golden balls. This door, like the other, had a space beneath it, rather wider than the other, and in ten minutes more the Very Young Man and Aura were beneath it, and inside the room.

As they grew larger again the Very Young Man at first thought the room was

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empty. "There he is," cried Aura happily. The Very Young Man looked and could see across the still huge room, the figure of Loto, standing at a window opening.

"Don't let him see us till we're his size," cautioned the Very Young Man. "I might frighten him. And if he made any noise—" He looked at the door behind them significantly.

Aura nodded eagerly; her face was radiant. Steadily larger they grew. Loto did not turn around, but stood quiet, looking out of the window.

They crept up close behind him, and when they were normal size Aura whispered his name softly. The boy turned in surprise and she faced him with a warning finger on her lips. He gave a low, happy little cry, and in another instant was in her arms, sobbing as she held him close to her breast.

The Very Young Man's eyes grew moist as he watched them, and heard the soft Oroid words of endearment they whispered to each other. He put his arms around them, too, and all at once he felt very big and very strong beside these two delicate, graceful little creatures of whom he was protector.

A noise in the hallway outside brought the Very Young Man to himself.

"We must get out," he said swiftly. "There's no time to lose." He went to the window; it faced the city, fifty feet or more above the ground.

The Very Young Man made a quick decision. "If we go out the way we came, it will take a very long time," he explained. "And we might be seen. I think we'd better take the quick way; get big here—get right out," he waved his hand toward the roof, "and make a run for it back to Arite."

He made another calculation. The room in which they were was on the top floor of the palace; Aura had told him that. It was a room about fifty feet in length, triangular in shape, and some thirty feet from floor to ceiling. The Very Young Man estimated that when they had grown large enough to fill the room, they could burst through the palace roof and leap to the ground. Then in a short time they could run over the country, back to Arite. He measured out the drug carefully, and without hesitation his companions took what he gave them.

As they all three started growing—it was Loto's first experience, and he gave an exclamation of fright at the sensation and threw his arms around Aura again—the Very Young Man made them sit upon the floor near the center of the room. He sat himself beside them, staring up at the ceiling that was steadily folding up and coming down toward them. For some time he stared, fascinated by its ceaseless movement.

Then suddenly he realized with a start that it was almost down upon them. He put up his hand and touched it, and a thrill of fear ran over him. He looked around. Beside him sat Aura and Loto, huddled close together. The walls of the room had nearly closed in upon them now; its few pieces of furniture had been pushed aside, unnoticed, by the growth of their enormous bodies. It was as if they were crouching in a triangular box, almost entirely filling it.

The Very Young Man laid his hand on Aura's arm, and she met his anxious glance with her fearless, trusting smile.

"We'll have to break through the roof next," whispered the Very Young Man, and the girl answered calmly: "What you say to do, we will do."

Their heads were bent down now by the ever-lowering ceiling; the Very Young Man pressed his shoulder against it and heaved upward. He could feel the floor under him quiver and the roof give beneath his thrust, but he did not break through. In sudden horror he wondered if he could. If he did not, soon, they would be crushed to death by their own growth within the room.

The Very Young Man knew there was still time to take the other drug. He shoved again, but with the same result. Their bodies were bent double by this time. The ceiling was pressing close upon them; the walls of the room were at their elbow. The Very Young Man crooked his arm through the little square orifice of window that he

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found at his side, and, with his signal to his companions, all three in unison heaved upward with all their strength. There came an agonizing instant of resistance; then with a wrenching of wood, the clatter of falling stones and a sudden crash, they burst through and straightened upright into the open air above.

The Very Young Man sat still for a moment, breathing hard. Overhead stretched the canopy of stars; around lay the city, shrunken now and still steadily diminishing. Then he got unsteadily upon his feet, pulling his companions up with him and shaking the bits of stone and broken wood from him as he did so.

In a moment more the palace roof was down to their knees, and they stepped out of the room. They heard a cry from below and saw the two guards, standing amidst the débris, looking up at them through the torn roof in fright and astonishment.

There came other shouts from within the palace now, and the sound of the hurrying of many little feet. For some minutes more they grew larger, as they stood upon the palace roof, clinging to one another and listening to the spreading cries of excitement within the building and in the city streets below them.

"Come on," said the Very Young Man finally, and he jumped off the roof into the street. A group of little figures scattered as he landed, and he narrowly escaped treading upon them.

So large had they grown that it was hardly more than a step down from the roof; Aura and Loto were by the Very Young Man's side in a moment, and immediately they started off, picking their way single file out of the city. For a short time longer they continued growing; when they had stopped the city houses stood hardly above their ankles.

It was difficult walking, for the street was narrow and the frightened people in it were often unable to avoid their tread, but fortunately the palace stood near the edge of the city, and soon they were past its last houses and out into the open country.

"Well, we did it," said the Very Young Man, exulting. Then he patted Loto affectionately upon the shoulder, adding, "Well, little brother, we got you back, didn't we?"

Aura stopped suddenly. "Look there—at Arite," she said, pointing up at the horizon ahead of them.

Far in the distance, at the edge of the lake, and beside a dim smudge he knew to be the houses of Arite, the Very Young Man saw the giant figure of a man, huge as himself, towering up against the background of sky.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DECISION

"GIANTS!" exclaimed the Doctor, staring across the country toward Orlog. There was dismay in his voice.

The Big Business Man, standing beside him, clutched at his robe. "How many do you make out? They look like three to me."

The Doctor strained his eyes into the dim, luminous distance. "Three, I think —one taller than the others; it must be Jack." His voice was a little husky, and held none of the confidence his words were intended to convey.

Lylda was upon her feet now, standing beside the Chemist. She stared toward Orlog searchingly, then turned to him and said quietly, "It must be Jack and Aura, with Loto." She stopped with quivering lips; then with an obvious effort went on confidently, "It cannot be that the God you believe in would let anything happen to them."

"They're coming this way, fast," said the Big Business Man. "We'll know in a few moments."

The figures, plainly visible now against the starry background, were out in the open country, half a mile perhaps from the lake, and were evidently rapidly approaching Arite.

"If it should be Targo's men," the Big Business Man added, "we must take more of the drug. It is death then for them or for us."

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In silence the six of them stood ankle-deep in the water waiting. The multitude of little people on the beach and in the nearby city streets were dispersing now. A steady stream was flowing up the steps from the beach, and back into the city. Five minutes more and only a fringe of those in whom the frenzy still raged remained at the water's edge; a few of these, more daring, or more unreasoning than the others, plunged into the lake and swam about the giants' ankles unnoticed.

Suddenly Lylda gave a sigh of relief. "Aura it is!" she cried. "Can you not see, there at the left? Her short robe—you see—and her hair, flowing down so long; no man is like that."

"You're right," said the Big Business Man. "The smallest one on this side is Loto; I can see him. And Jack is leading. It's all right; they're safe. Thank God for that; they're safe, thank God!" The fervent relief in his voice showed what a strain he had been under.

It was Jack; a moment more left no doubt of that. The Big Business Man turned to the Chemist and Lylda, where they stood close together, and laying a hand upon the shoulder of each said with deep feeling: "We have all come through it safely, my friends. And now the way lies clear before us. We must go back, out of this world, to which we have brought only trouble. It is the only way; you must see that."

Lylda avoided his eyes.

"All through it safely," she murmured after him. "All safe except—except my father." Her arm around the Chemist tightened. "All safe, except those." She turned her big, sorrowful eyes toward the beach, where a thousand little mangled figures lay dead and dying. "All safe, except those."

It was only a short time before the adventurers from Orlog arrived, and Loto was in his mother's arms. The Very Young Man, with mixed feelings of pride at his exploit, and relief at being freed from so grave a responsibility, happily displayed Aura to his friends.

"Gosh, I'm glad we're all together again; it had me scared, that's a fact." His eye fell upon the beach. "Great Scott, you've been having a fight, too? Look at that." The Big Business Man and the Doctor outlined briefly what had happened, and the Very Young Man answered in turn with an account of his adventures.

Aura joined her sister and Loto. The Chemist after a moment stood apart from the others thinking deeply. He had said little during all the events of the afternoon and evening. Now he reached the inevitable decision that events had forced upon him. His face was very serious as he called his companions around him.

"We must decide at once," he began, looking from one to the other, "what we are to do. Our situation here has become intolerable—desperate. I agree with you," his glance rested on the Big Business Man an instant; "by staying here we can only do harm to these misguided people."

"Of course," the Big Business Man interjected under his breath.

"If the drugs should ever get out of our possession down here, immeasurable harm would result to this world, as well as causing our own deaths. If we leave immediately, we save ourselves; although we leave the Oroids ruled by Targo. But without the power of the drugs, he can do only temporary harm. Eventually he will be overthrown. It is the best way, I think. And I am ready to leave."

"It's the only way," the Big Business Man agreed. "Don't you think so?" The Doctor and the Very Young Man both assented.

"The sooner the better," the Very Young Man added. He glanced at Aura, and the thought that flashed into his mind made his heart jump violently.

The Chemist turned to Lylda. "To leave your people," he said gently, "I know how hard it is. But your way now lies with me—with us." He pulled Loto up against him as he spoke.

Lylda bowed her head. "You speak true, my husband; my way does lie with you. I cannot help the feeling that we should stay. But with you my way does lie;

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whither you direct, we shall go—forever."

The Chemist kissed her tenderly. "My sister also?" he smiled gently at Aura.

"My way lies with you, too," the girl answered simply. "For no man here has held my heart."

The Very Young Man stepped forward. "Do we take them with us?" He indicated Oteo and Eena, who stood silently watching.

"Ask them, Lylda," said the Chemist.

CALLING them to her, Lylda spoke to the youth and the girl in her native tongue. They listened quietly; Oteo with an almost expressionless stolidity of face, but with his soft, doglike eyes fixed upon his mistress; Eena with heaving breast and trembling limbs. When Lylda paused they both fell upon their knees before her. She put her hands upon their heads and smiling wistfully said in English:

"So it shall be; with me you shall go, because that is what you wish."

The Very Young Man looked around at them all with satisfaction. "Then it's all settled," he said, and again his glance fell on Aura. He wondered why his heart was pounding so, and why he was so thrilled with happiness; and he was glad he was able to speak in so matter of fact a tone.

"I don't know how about you," he added, "but, great Scott, I'm hungry."

"Since we have decided to go," the Chemist said, "we had better start as soon as possible. Are there things in the house. Lylda, that you care to take?"

Lylda shook her head. "Nothing can I take but memories of this world, and those would I rather leave." She smiled sadly. "There are some things I would wish to do—my father—"

"It might be dangerous to wait," the Big Business Man put in hurriedly. "The sooner we start the better. Another encounter would only mean more death." He looked significantly at the beach.

"We've got to eat," said the Very Young Man.

"If we handle the drugs right," the Chemist said, "we can make the trip out in a very short time. When we get above the forest and well on our way we can rest safely. Let us start at once."

"We've got to eat," the Very Young Man insisted. "And we've got to have food with us."

The Chemist smiled. "What you say is quite true, Jack. We have got to have food and water; that is the only thing necessary to our trip."

"We can make ourselves small right away, and have supper," suggested the Very Young Man. "Then we can fill up the bottles for our belts and take enough food for the trip."

"No, we won't," interposed the Big Business Man positively. "We won't get small again. Something might happen. Once we get through the tunnels—" He stopped abruptly.

"Great Scott! We never thought of that," ejaculated the Very Young Man, as the same thought occurred to him. "We'll have to get small to get through the tunnels. Suppose there's a mob there that won't let us in?"

"Is there any other way up to the forest?" the Doctor asked.

The Chemist shook his head. "There are a dozen different tunnels, all near here, and several at Orlog, that all lead to the upper surface. But I think that is the only way."

"They might try to stop us," the Big Business Man suggested. "We certainly had better get through them as quickly as we possibly can."

It was Aura who diffidently suggested the plan they finally adopted. They all reduced their size first to about the height of the Chemist's house. Then the Very Young Man prepared to make himself sufficiently small to get the food and water-bottles and bring them up to the larger size.

"Keep your eye on me," he warned. "Somebody might jump on me."

They stood around the house, while the Very Young Man, in the garden, took the drug and dwindled in stature to Oroid size. There were none of the Oroids in sight, except some on the beach and others up the street silently watching. As he grew smaller

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the Very Young Man sat down wearily in the wreck of Lylda's beautiful garden.

When he was no longer changing size he stood up in the garden-path. The house, nearly its proper dimensions once more, was close at hand, silent and deserted. Aura stood in the garden beside it, her shoulders pushing aside the great branches of an overhanging tree, her arm resting upon the roof-top. The Very Young Man waved up at her and shouted: "Be out in a minute," and then plunged into the house.

CHAPTER XXVII

GOOD-BY TO ARITE

ONCE inside he went swiftly to the room where they had left their water-bottles and other paraphernalia. He found them without difficulty, and retraced his steps to the door he had entered. Depositing his load near it, he went back toward the room which Lylda had described to him, and in which the food was stored.

Walking along this silent hallway, listening to the echoes of his own footsteps on its stone floor, the Very Young Man found himself oppressed by a feeling of impending danger. He looked back over his shoulder—once he stood quite still and listened. But he heard nothing; the house was quite silent, and smiling at his own fear he went on again.

Selecting the food they needed for the trip took him but a moment. He left the storeroom, his arms loaded, and started back toward the garden door. Several doorways opened into the hall below, and all

They stood at the river's edge watching the gigantic struggle that meant life or death to them all

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at once the Very Young Man found himself afraid as he passed them. He was within sight of the garden door, not more than twenty feet away, when he hesitated. Just ahead, at his right, an archway opened into a room beside the hall. The Very Young Man paused only an instant; then, ashamed of his fear, started slowly forward. He felt an impulse to run, but he did not. And then, from out of the silence, there came a low, growling cry that made his heart stand still, and the huge gray figure of a man leaped upon him and bore him to the ground.

As he went down, with the packages of food flying in all directions, the Very Young Man gripped the naked body of his antagonist tightly. He twisted around as he fell and lay with his foe partly on top of him. He knew instinctively that his situation was desperate. The man's huge torso, with its powerful muscles that his arms encircled, told him that in a contest of strength such as this, inevitably he would find himself overcome.

The man raised his fist to strike, and the Very Young Man caught him by the wrist. Over his foe's shoulder now he could see the open doorway leading into the garden, not more than six or eight feet away. Beyond it lay safety; that he knew. He gave a mighty lunge and succeeded in rolling over toward the doorway. But he could not stay above his opponent, for the man's greater strength lifted him up and over, and again pinned him to the floor.

He was nearer the door now, and just beyond it he caught a glimpse of the white flesh of Aura's ankle as she stood beside the house. The man put a hand on the Very Young Man's throat. The Very Young Man caught it by the wrist, but he could feel the growing pressure of its fingers cutting off his breath. He tried to pull the hand back, but could not; he tried to twist his body free, but the weight of his foe held him tightly against the floor. A great roaring filled his ears; the hallway began fading from his sight. With a last despairing breath, he gave a choking cry: "Aura! Aura!"

The man's fingers at his throat loosened a little; he drew another breath, and his head cleared. His eyes were fixed on the strip of garden he could see beyond the doorway. Suddenly Aura's enormous body came into view, as she stooped and then lay prone upon the ground. Her face was close to the door; she was looking in. The Very Young Man gave another cry, half stifled. And then into the hallway he saw come swiftly a huge hand, whose fingers gripped him and his antagonist and jerked them hurriedly down the hall and out into the garden.

As they lay struggling on the ground outside, the Very Young Man felt himself held less closely. He wrenched himself free and sprang to his feet, standing close beside Aura's face. The man was up almost as quickly, preparing again to spring upon his victim. Something moved behind the Very Young Man, and he looked up into the air hurriedly. The Big Business Man stood behind him; the Very Young Man met his anxious glance.

"I'm all right," he shouted. His antagonist leaped forward and at the same instant a huge, flat object, that was the Big Business Man's foot, swept through the air and mashed the man down into the dirt of the garden. The Very Young Man turned suddenly sick as he heard the agonized shriek and the crunching of the breaking bones. The Big Business Man lifted his foot, and the mangled figure lay still. The Very Young Man sat down suddenly in the garden-path and covered his face with his hands.

When he raised his head his friends were all standing around him, crowding the garden. The body of the man who had attacked him had disappeared. The Very Young Man looked up into Aura's face—she was on her feet again with the others—and tried to smile.

"I'm all right," he repeated. "I'll go get the food and things."

In a few minutes more he had made himself as large as his companions, and had brought with him most of the food. There still remained in the smaller size the wa-

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ter-bottles, some of the food, the belts with which to carry it, and a few other articles they needed for the trip.

"I'll get them," said the Big Business Man; "you sit down and rest."

The Very Young Man was glad to do as he was told, and sat beside Aura in the garden, while the Big Business Man brought up to their size the remainder of the supplies.

When they had divided the food; and all were equipped for the journey, they started at once for the tunnels. Lylda's eyes again filled with tears as she left so summarily, and probably for the last time, this home in which she had been so happy.

AS THEY passed the last houses of the city, heading toward the tunnel entrances that the Chemist had selected, the Big Business Man and the Chemist walked in front, the others following close behind them. A crowd of Oroids watched them leave, and many others were to be seen ahead; but these scattered as the giants approached. Occasionally a few stood their ground, and these the Big Business Man mercilessly trampled under foot.

"It's the only way; I'm sorry," he said, half apologetically. "We cannot take any chances; we must get out."

"It's shorter through these tunnels I'm taking," the Chemist said after a moment.

"My idea," said the Big Business Man, "is that we should go through the tunnels that are the largest. They're not all the same size, are they?"

"No," the Chemist answered, "some are a little larger."

"You see," the Big Business Man continued, "I figure we are going to have a fight. They're following us. Look at that crowd over there. They'll never let us out if they can help it. When we get into the tunnels, naturally we'll have to be small enough to walk through them. The larger we are the better; so let's take the very biggest."

"These are," the Chemist answered. "We can make it at about so high." He held his hand about level with his waist.

"That won't be so bad," the Big Business Man commented.

Meanwhile the Very Young Man, walking with Aura behind the leaders, was talking to her earnestly. He was conscious of a curious sense of companionship with this quiet girl. A companionship unlike anything he had ever felt for a girl before. And now that he was taking her with him, back to his own world—

"Climb out onto the surface of the ring," he was saying, "and then, in a few minutes more, we'll be there. Aura, you cannot realize how wonderful it will be."

The girl smiled her quiet smile; her face was sad with the memory of what she was leaving, but full of youthful, eager anticipation of that which lay ahead.

"So much has happened, and so quickly, I cannot realize it yet, I know," she answered. "But that it will be very wonderful, up there above, I do believe. And I am glad that we are going, only—"

The Very Young Man took her hand, holding it a moment. "Don't, Aura. You mustn't think of that." He spoke gently, with a tender note that had never been in his voice before.

"Don't think of the past, Aura," he went on earnestly. "Think only of the future—the great cities, the opera, the poetry I am going to teach you."

The girl laid her hand on his arm. "You are so kind, my friend Jack. You will have much to teach me, will you not? Is it sure you will want to? I shall be like a little child up there in your great world."

An answer sprang to the Very Young Man's lips—words the thinking of which made his heart leap into his throat. But before he voiced them Loto ran up to him from behind, crying, "I want to walk by you, Jack; *mamita* talks of things I know not."

The Very Young Man put his arm across the child's shoulders. "Well, little boy," he said laughing, "how do you like this adventure?"

"Never have I been in the Great Forests," Loto answered, turning his big, serious eyes up to his friend's face. "I shall

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not be afraid—with my father, and *mamita,* and with you."

"The Great Forests won't seem very big, Loto, after a little while," the Very Young Man said. "And of course you won't be afraid of anything. You're going to see many things, Loto. Very many strange and wonderful things for such a little boy like yourself."

They reached the entrance to the tunnel in a few moments more, and stopped before it. As they approached, a number of little figures darted into its luminous blackness and disappeared. There were none others in sight now, except far away toward Arite, where perhaps a thousand stood watching intently.

The tunnel entrance, against the side of a hill, stood nearly breast high.

"I'm wrong," said the Chemist, as the others came up. "It's not so high all the way through. We shall have to make ourselves much smaller than this."

"This is a good time to eat," suggested the Very Young Man. The others agreed, and without making themselves any smaller—the Big Business Man objected to that procedure—they sat down before the mouth of the tunnel and ate a somewhat frugal meal.

"Have you any plans for the trip up?" asked the Doctor of the Chemist while they were eating.

"I have," interjected the Big Business Man, and the Chemist answered:

"Yes, I am sure I can make it far easier than it was for me before. I'll tell you as we go up; the first thing is to get through the tunnels."

"I don't anticipate much difficulty in that," the Doctor said. "Do you?"

The Chemist shook his head. "No."

"But we mustn't take any chances," put in the Big Business Man quickly. "How small do you suppose we should make ourselves?"

The Chemist looked at the tunnel opening. "About half that," he replied.

"Not at the start," said the Big Business Man. "Let's go in as large as possible; we can get smaller when we have to."

It took them but a few minutes to finish the meal. They were all tired from the exciting events of the day, but the Big Business Man would not hear of their resting a moment more than was absolutely necessary.

"It won't be much of a trip up to the forests," he argued. "Once we get well on our way and into one of the larger sizes, we can sleep safely. But not now; it's too dangerous."

They were soon ready to start, and in a moment more all had made themselves small enough to walk into the tunnel opening. They were at this time, perhaps six times the normal height of an adult Oroid. The city of Arite, apparently much farther away now, was still visible up against the distant horizon. As they were about to start, Lylda, with Aura close beside her, turned to face it.

"Good-by to our own world, we must say, my sister," she said sadly. "The land that bore us—so beautiful a world, and once so kindly. We have been very happy here. And I cannot think it is right for me to leave."

"Your way lies with your husband," Aura said gently. "You yourself have said it, and it is true."

Lylda raised her arms up toward the far-away city with a gesture almost of benediction.

"Good future to you, land that I love." Her voice trembled. "Good future to you, forever and ever."

The Very Young Man, standing behind them with Loto, was calling: "They're started; come on."

With one last sorrowful glance Lylda turned slowly, and, walking with her arm about her sister, followed the others into the depths of the tunnel.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE FIGHT IN THE TUNNELS

FOR some time this strange party of refugees from an outraged world walked in silence. Because of their size, the tunnel appeared to them now not more than eight

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or nine feet in height, and in most places of nearly similar width. For perhaps ten minutes no one spoke except an occasional monosyllable. The Chemist and Big Business Man, walking abreast, were leading; Aura and Lylda with the Very Young Man, and Loto close in front of them, brought up the rear.

The tunnel they were traversing appeared quite deserted; only once, at the intersection of another smaller passageway, a few little figures—not more than a foot high—scurried past and hastily disappeared. Once the party stopped for half an hour to rest.

"I don't think we'll have any trouble getting through," said the Chemist. "The tunnels are usually deserted at the time of sleep."

The Big Business Man appeared not so sanguine, but said nothing. Finally they came to one of the large amphitheaters into which several of the tunnels opened. In size, it appeared to them now a hundred feet in length and with a roof some twelve feet high. The Chemist stopped to let the others come up.

"I think our best route is there," he pointed.

"It is not so high a tunnel; we shall have to get smaller. Beyond it they are larger again. It is not far—half an hour, perhaps, walking as we—"

A cry from Aura interrupted him.

"My brother, see, they come!" she exclaimed.

Before them, out of several of the smaller passageways, a crowd of little figures was pouring. There were no shouts; there was seemingly no confusion; just a steady, flowing stream of human forms, emptying from the tunnels into the amphitheater and spreading out over its open surface.

The fugitives stared a moment in horror. "They've got us," the Doctor muttered, breaking the tenseness of the silence.

The little people kept their distance at first, and then as the open space filled up, slowly they began coming closer, in little waves of movement, irresistible as an incoming tide.

Aura turned toward the passageway through which they had entered. "We can go back," she said. And then, "No—see, they come there, too." A crowd of the little gray figures blocked that entrance also. A crowd that hesitated an instant and then came forward, spreading out fan-shape as it came.

The Big Business Man doubled up his fists.

"It's fight," he said grimly. "All right, we'll—" But Lylda, with a low cry, flung herself before him.

"No, no," she said passionately. "Not that; it cannot be that now, just at the last."

Aura laid a hand upon her sister's shoulder.

"Wait, my sister," she said gently. "There is no matter of justice here for you, a woman to decide. This is for men to deal with. A matter for men—our men. And what they say to do, that must be done."

She turned to the Chemist and the Very Young Man, who were standing side by side.

"A woman cannot kill," she said slowly. "Unless her man says it so. Or if to save him—"

Her eyes flashed fire; she held her slim little body erect and rigid, an Amazon ready to fight to the death for those she loved.

The Chemist hesitated a moment. Before he could answer, a single shrill cry sounded from somewhere out in the silent, menacing throng. As though at a signal, a thousand little voices took it up, and with a great rush the crowd swept forward.

In the first moment of surprise and indecision the group of fugitives stood motionless. As the wave of little, struggling, human forms closed in around them the Very Young Man came to himself with a start. He looked down. They were black around him now, swaying back and forth about his legs. Most of them were men, armed with the short, broad-bladed swords, or with smaller knives. Some brandished other improvised weapons; still others held rocks in their hands.

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A LITTLE pair of arms clutched the Very Young Man about his leg; he gave a violent kick, scattered a number of the struggling figures and cleared a little space into which he leaped.

"Back—Aura, Lylda," he shouted. "Take Loto and Eena. Get back behind us."

The Big Business Man, kicking violently, and sometimes stooping down to sweep the ground with great swings of his arm, had cleared a space before them. Taking Loto, who looked on with big, frightened eyes, the three women stepped back against the side wall of the amphitheater.

The Very Young Man swiftly discarded his robe, standing in the knitted under-suit in which he had swam the lake; the other men followed his example. For ten minutes or more, in ceaseless waves, the little creatures threw themselves forward, and were beaten back. The confined space echoed with their shouts, and with the cries of the wounded. The five men fought silently. Once the Doctor stumbled and fell. Before his friends could get to him, his body was covered with his foes. When he got back upon his feet, knocking them off, he was bleeding profusely from an ugly looking wound in his shoulder.

He panted as the Chemist and the Big Business Man leaped over to him, "They'll get us, if we go down."

"We can get larger," said the Big Business Man, pointing upward to the roof overhead. "Larger, and then—" He swayed a little, breathing hard. His legs were covered with blood from a dozen wounds.

Oteo, fighting back and forth before them, was holding the crowd in check; a heap of dead lay in a semicircle in front of him.

"I'm going across," shouted the Very Young Man suddenly, and he began striding forward into the struggling mass.

The crowd, thus diverted, eased its attack for a moment. Slowly the Very Young Man waded into it. He was perhaps fifty feet out from the side wall when a stone struck him upon the temple. He went down, out of sight in the seething mass.

"Come on," shouted the Big Business Man. But before he could move Aura dashed past him, fighting her way out to where the Very Young Man lay. In a moment she was beside him. Her fragile little body seemed hopelessly inadequate for such a struggle, but the spirit within her made her fight like a wildcat.

Catching one of the little figures by the legs she flung him about like a club, knocking a score of the others back and clearing a space about the Very Young Man. Then abruptly she dropped her victim and knelt down, plucking away the last of the attacking figures who was hacking at the Very Young Man's arm with his sword.

The Chemist and Big Business Man were beside her now, and together they carried the Very Young Man back. He had recovered consciousness, and smiled up at them feebly. They laid him on the ground against the wall, and Aura sat beside him.

"Gosh, I'll be all right," he said, waving them away. "Be with you in a minute; give 'em hell!"

The Doctor knelt beside the Very Young Man for a moment, and, finding he was not seriously hurt, left him and rejoined the Chemist and Big Business Man, who, with Oteo, had forced the struggling mass of little figures some distance away.

"I'm going to get larger," shouted the Big Business Man a moment later. "Wipe them all out. I can do it. We can't keep on this way." The Doctor was by his side.

"You can't do it—isn't room," he shouted in answer, pausing as he waved one of his assailants in the air above his head. "You might take too much."

The Big Business Man was reaching with one hand under his robe. With his feet he kicked violently to keep the space about him clear. A little stone flew by his head; another struck him on the chest, and all at once he realized that he was bruised all over from where other stones had been hitting him. He looked across to the opposite wall of the amphitheater. Through the tunnel entrance there he saw that the stream of little people were flowing the other way now. They were trying to get out, instead of pouring in.

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The Big Business Man waved his arms. "They're running away—look," he shouted. "They're running, over there. Come on." He dashed forward, and, followed by his companions, redoubled his efforts.

The crowd wavered; the shouting grew less; those further away began running back.

Then suddenly a shrill cry arose—just a single little voice it was at first. After a moment others took it up, and still others, until it sounded from every side—three Oroid words repeated over and over.

The Chemist abruptly stopped fighting. "It's done," he shouted. "Thank God it's over."

THE cry continued. The little figures had ceased attacking now and were struggling in a frenzy to get through the tunnels.

"No more," shouted the Chemist. "They're going. See them going? Stop."

His companions stood by his side, panting and weak from loss of blood. The Chemist tried to smile. His face was livid; he swayed unsteadily on his feet. "No more," he repeated. "It's over. Thank God, it's over!"

Meanwhile the Very Young Man, lying on the floor with Aura sitting beside him, revived a little. He tried to sit up after a few moments, but the girl pulled him down.

"But I got to go—give 'em hell," he protested weakly. His head was still confused; he only knew he should be back fighting beside his friends.

"Not yet," Aura said gently. "There is no need, yet. When there is, you may trust me, Jack; I shall say it."

The Very Young Man closed his eyes. The blurred, iridescent outlines of the rocks confused him; his head was ringing. The girl put an arm under his neck. He found one of her hands, and held it tightly. For a moment he lay silent. Then his head seemed to clear a little; he opened his eyes.

"What are they doing now, Aura?" he asked.

"It is no different," the girl answered softly. "So terrible a thing—so terrible—" she finished almost to herself.

"I'll wait—just a minute more," he murmured and closed his eyes again.

He held the girl's hand tighter. He seemed to be floating away, and her hand steadied him. The sounds of the fighting were very distant now—all blurred and confused and dreamlike. Only the girl's nearness seemed real—the touch of her little body against his as she sat beside him.

"Aura," he whispered, "Aura."

The girl put her face down to his. "Yes, Jack," she answered gently.

"It's very bad—there—don't you think?"

She did not answer.

"I was just thinking," he went on; he spoke slowly, almost in a whisper. "Maybe, you know, we won't come through this." He paused; his thoughts somehow seemed too big to put into words. But he knew he was very happy.

"I was just thinking, Aura, that if we shouldn't come through I just wanted you to know—" Again he stopped. From far-away he heard the shrill, rhythmic cry of many voices shouting in unison. He listened, and then it all came back. The battle—his friends there fighting—they needed him. He let go of the girl's hand and sat up, brushing back his moist hair.

"Listen, Aura. Hear them shouting; I mustn't stay here." He tried, weakly, to get upon his feet, but the girl's arm about his waist held him down.

"Wait," she said. Surprised by the tenseness of her tone, he relaxed.

The cry grew louder, rolling up from a thousand voices and echoing back and forth across the amphitheater. The Very Young Man wondered vaguely what it could mean. He looked into Aura's face. Her lips were smiling now.

"What is it, Aura?" he whispered.

The girl impulsively put her arms about him and held him close.

"But we are coming through, my friend Jack. We are coming through." The Very Young Man looked wonderingly into her eyes. "Don't you hear? That cry—the cry

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of fear and despair. It means—life to us; and no more death—to them."

The Chemist's voice came out of the distance shouting: "They're running away. It's over; thank God it's over!"

Then the Very Young Man knew, and life opened up before him again. "Life," he whispered to himself. "Life and love and happiness."

CHAPTER XXIX

A COMBAT OF TITANS

IN A few minutes the amphitheater was entirely clear, save for the dead and maimed little figures lying scattered about; but it was nearly an hour more before the fugitives were ready to resume their journey.

The attack had come so suddenly, and had demanded such immediate and continuous action that none of the men, with the exception of the Very Young Man, had had time to realize how desperate was the situation in which they had fallen. With the almost equally abrupt cessation of the struggle there came the inevitable reaction. The men, bleeding from a score of wounds, weak from loss of blood, and sick from the memory of the things they had been compelled to do, threw themselves upon the ground utterly exhausted.

"We must get out of here," said the Doctor, after they had been lying quiet for a time, with the strident shrieks of hundreds of the dying little creatures sounding in their ears. "That was pretty near the end."

"It isn't far," the Chemist answered, "when we get started."

"We must get water," the Doctor went on. "These cuts—" They had used nearly all their drinking-water washing out their wounds, which Aura and Lylda had bound up with strips of cloth torn from their garments.

The Chemist got upon his feet. "There's no water nearer than the Forest River," he said. "This tunnel over there comes out very near it."

"What makes you think we won't have another scrap getting out?" the Very Young Man wanted to know. He had entirely recovered from the effects of the stone that had struck him on the temple, and was in better condition than any of the other men.

"I'm sure," the Chemist said confidently, "they were through; they will not attack us again; for some time at least. The tunnels will be deserted."

The Big Business Man stood up also.

"We'd better get going while we have the chance," he said. "This getting smaller. I don't like it."

They started soon after, and, true to the Chemist's prediction, met no further obstacle to their safe passage through the tunnels. When they had reached the forest above, none of the little people was in sight.

The Big Business Man heaved a long sigh of relief. "Thank Goodness we're here at last," he said. "I didn't realize how good these woods would look."

In a few minutes more they were at the edge of the river, bathing their wounds in its cooling water, and replenishing their drinking-bottles.

"How do we get across?" the Very Young Man asked.

"We won't have to cross it," the Chemist answered with a smile. "The tunnel took us under."

"Let's eat here," the Very Young Man suggested, "and take a sleep; we're about all in."

"We ought to get larger first," protested the Big Business Man. They were at this time about four times Oroid size; the forest trees, so huge when last they had seen them, now seemed only rather large saplings.

"Some one of us must stay awake," the Doctor said. "But there do not seem to be any Oroids up here."

"What do they come up here for, anyway?" asked the Very Young Man.

"There's some hunting," the Chemist answered. "But principally it's the mines beyond in the deserts."

They agreed finally to stop beside the river and eat another meal, and then, with one of them on guard, to sleep for a time.

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The meal, at the Doctor's insistence, was frugal to the extreme, and was soon over. They selected Oteo to stand guard first. The youth, when he understood what was intended, pleaded so with his master that the Chemist agreed. Utterly worn out, the travelers lay down on a mossy bank at the river's edge, and in a few moments were all fast asleep.

Oteo sat near by with his back against a tree-trunk. Occasionally he got up and walked to and fro to fight off the drowsiness that came over him.

HOW long the Very Young Man slept he never knew. He slept dreamlessly for a considerable time. When he struggled back to consciousness it was with a curious feeling of detachment, as though his mind no longer was connected with his body. He thought first of Aura, with a calm, peaceful sense of happiness. For a long time he lay, drifting along with his thoughts and wondering whether he were asleep or awake. Then all at once he knew he was not asleep. His eyes were open; before him stood the forest trees at the river's edge. And at the foot of one of the trees he could see the figure of Oteo, sitting hunched up with his head upon his hands, fast asleep.

Remembrance came to the Very Young Man, and he sat up with a start. Beside him his friends lay motionless. He looked around, still a little confused. And then his heart leaped into his throat, for at the edge of the woods he saw a little, lean, gray figure—the little figure of a man who stood against a tree-trunk. The man's face was turned toward him; he met the glistening eyes looking down and saw the lips parted in a leering smile.

A thrill of fear ran over the Very Young Man as he recognized the face of Targo. And then his heart seemed to stop beating. For as he stared, fascinated, into the man's mocking eyes, he saw that slowly, steadily he was growing larger. Mechanically his hand went to his armpit, his fingers fumbling at the pouch strapped underneath. The vial of chemicals was not there.

For an instant more the Very Young Man continued staring. Then, with an effort, he turned his eyes away from the gaze that seemed to hypnotize him. Beside him the Chemist lay sleeping. He looked back at Targo, and saw him larger—almost as large now as he was himself.

Like a cloak discarded, the Very Young Man's bewilderment dropped from him. He recognized the danger, realized that in another moment this enemy would be irresistibly powerful—invincible. His mind was clear now, his nerves steady, his muscles tense. He knew the only thing he could do; he calculated the chances in a flash of thought.

Still staring at the triumphant face of Targo, the Very Young Man jumped to his feet and swiftly bent over the sleeping form of the Chemist. Reaching through the neck of his robe he took out the vial of chemicals, and before his friend was fairly awake had swallowed one of the pills.

As the Very Young Man sprang into action Targo turned and ran swiftly away, perhaps a hundred feet; then again he stopped and stood watching his intended victims with his sardonic smile.

The Very Young Man met the Chemist's startled eyes.

"Targo!" said the Very Young Man swiftly. "He's here; he stole the drug just now, while I was sleeping."

The Chemist opened his mouth to reply, but the Very Young Man bounded away. He could feel the drug beginning to work; the ground under his feet swayed unsteadily.

Swiftly he ran straight toward the figure of Targo, where he stood leaning against a tree. His enemy did not move to run away, but stood quietly awaiting him. The Very Young Man saw they were now nearly the same size; that Targo was, if anything, the larger.

A fallen tree separated them; the Very Young Man cleared it with a bound. Still Targo stood motionless, awaiting his onslaught. Then abruptly he stooped to the ground, and a rock whistled through the air, narrowly missing the Very Young Man's head. Before Targo could recover

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from the throw the Very Young Man was upon him, and they went down together.

Back and forth over the soft ground they rolled, first one on top, then the other. The Very Young Man's hand found a stone on the ground beside them. His fingers clutched it; he raised it above him. But a blow upon his forearm knocked it away before he could strike; and a sudden twist of his antagonist's body rolled him over and pinned him upon his back.

The Very Young Man thought of his encounter with Targo before, and again with sinking heart he realized he was the weaker of the two. He jerked one of his wrists free and, striking upward with all his force, landed full on his enemy's jaw. The man's head snapped back, but he laughed—a grim, sardonic laugh that ended in a half growl, like that of a wild beast enraged. The Very Young Man's blood ran cold. A sudden frenzy seized him; he put all his strength into one desperate lunge and, wrenching himself free, sprang quickly to his feet.

Targo was up almost as quickly as he, and for an instant the two stood eying each other, breathing hard. At the Very Young Man's feet a little stream was flowing past. Vaguely he found himself thinking how peaceful it looked; how cool and soothing the water would be to his bruised and aching body. Beside the stream his eyes caught a number of tiny human figures, standing close together, looking up at him —little forms that a single sweep of his foot would have scattered and killed. A shiver of fear ran across him as in a flash he realized this other danger. With a cry, he leaped sidewise, away from the water. Beside him stood a little tree whose bushy top hardly reached his waist. He clutched its trunk with both hands and jerking it from the ground swung it at his enemy's head, meeting him just as he sprang forward. The tree struck Targo a glancing blow upon the shoulder. With another laugh he grasped its roots and twisted it from the Very Young Man's hand. A second more and they came together again, and the Very Young Man felt his antagonist's powerful arms around his body, bending him backward.

THE Big Business Man stood beside the others at the river's edge, watching the gigantic struggle, the outcome of which meant life or death to them all. The grappling figures were ten times his own height before he fairly realized the situation. At first he thought he should take some of the drug also, and grow larger with them. Then he knew that he could not overtake their growth in time to aid his friend. The Chemist and the Doctor must evidently have reached the same conclusion, for they, too, did nothing, only stood motionless, speechless, staring up at the battling giants.

Loto, with his head buried upon his mother's shoulder, and with her arms holding him close, whimpered a little in terror. Only Aura, of all of the party, did not get upon her feet. She lay full length upon the ground, a hand under her chin, staring steadily upward. Her face was expressionless, her eyes unblinking. But her lips moved a little, as though she were breathing a silent prayer, and dug her nails into the flesh of her cheek.

Taller far than the tree-tops, the two giants stood facing each other. Then the Very Young Man seized one of the trees, and with a mighty pull tore it up by the roots and swung it through the air. Aura drew a quick breath as in another instant they grappled and came crashing to the ground, falling head and shoulders in the river with a splash that drenched her with its spray. The Very Young Man was underneath, and she seemed to meet the glance of his great eyes when he fell. The trees growing on the river-bank snapped like rushes beneath the huge bodies of the giants, as still growing larger, they struggled back and forth. The river, stirred into turmoil by the sweep of their great arms, rolled its waves up over the mossy banks, driving the watchers back into the edge of the woods, and even there covering them with its spray.

A moment more and the giants were on their feet again, standing ankle deep, far

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out in the river. Up against the unbroken blackness of the starless sky their huge forms towered. For a second they stood motionless; then they came together again and Aura could see the Very Young Man sink to his knees, his hand trailing in the water. Then in an instant more he struggled up to his feet; and as his hand left the water Aura saw that it clutched an enormous dripping rock. She held her breath, watching the tremendous figures as they swayed, locked in each other's arms. A single step sidewise and they were back nearly at the river's bank; the water seethed white under their tread.

The Very Young Man's right arm hung limp behind him; the boulder in his hand dangled a hundred feet or more in the air above the water. Slowly the greater strength of his antagonist bent him backward. Aura's heart stood still as she saw Targo's fingers at the Very Young Man's throat. Then, in a great arc, the Very Young Man swept the hand holding the rock over his head and brought it down full upon his enemy's skull. The boulder fell into the river with a thundering splash. For a brief instant the giant figures hung swaying; then the titanic hulk of Targo's body came crashing down. It fell full across the river, quivered convulsively and lay still.

And the river, backing up before it a moment, turned aside in its course, and flung the muddy torrent of its water roaring down through the forest.

CHAPTER XXX

OUT OF THE RING

THE Very Young Man stood ankle deep in the turgid little rivulet, a tightness clutching at his chest and with his head whirling. At his feet his antagonist lay motionless. He stepped out of the water, putting his foot into a tiny grove of trees that bent and crackled like twigs under his tread. He wondered if he would faint; he knew he must not. Away to the left he saw a line of tiny hills; beyond that a luminous obscurity into which his sight could not penetrate; behind him there was only darkness. He seemed to be standing in the midst of a great barren waste, with just a little toy river and forest at his feet—a child's plaything, set down in a man's great desert.

The Very Young Man suddenly thought of his friends. He stepped into the middle of the river and out again on the other side. Then he bent down with his face close to the ground, just above the tops of the tiny little trees. He made them out finally. Hardly larger than ants they seemed, and he shuddered as he saw them. The end of his thumb could have mashed them all, they were so small.

One of the figures seemed to be waving something, and the Very Young Man thought he heard the squeak of its voice. He straightened upright, standing rigid, afraid to move his feet. He wondered what he should do, and in sudden fear felt for the vial of the diminishing drug. It was still in place, in the pouch under his armpit. The Very Young Man breathed a sigh of relief. He decided to take the drug and rejoin his friends. Then as a sudden thought struck him he bent down to the ground again, slowly, with infinite caution. The little figures were still there; and now he thought they were not quite so tiny as before. He watched them; slowly but unmistakably they were growing larger.

The Very Young Man carefully took a step backward, and then sat down heavily. The forest trees crackled under him. He pulled up his knees, and rested his head upon them. The little rivulet diverted from its course by the body of Targo, swept past through the woods almost at his side. The noise it made mingled with the ringing in his head. His body ached all over; he closed his eyes.

"HE'S all right now," the Doctor's voice said. "He'll be all right in a moment."

The Very Young Man opened his eyes. He was lying upon the ground, with Aura sitting beside him, and his friends—all his own size again—standing over him.

He met Aura's tender, serious eyes, and

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smiled. "I'm all right," he said. "What a fool thing to faint."

Lylda stooped beside him. "You saved us all," she said. "There is nothing we can say, to mean what it should. But you will always know how we feel; how splendid you were."

To the praise they gave him the Very Young Man had no answer save a smile of embarrassment. Aura said nothing, only met his smile with one of her own, and with a tender glance that made his heart beat faster.

"I'm all right," he repeated after a moment of silence. "Let's get started."

They sat down now beside the Very Young Man, and earnestly discussed the best plan for getting out of the ring.

"You said you had calculated the best way," suggested the Doctor to the Chemist.

"First of all," interrupted the Big Business Man. "Are we sure none of these Oroids is going to follow us? For Heaven's sake let's have done with these terrible struggles."

The Very Young Man remembered. "He stole one of the vials," he said, pointing to Targo's body.

"He was probably alone," the Chemist reasoned. "If any others had been with him they would have taken some of the drug also. Probably Targo took one of the pills and then dropped the vial to the ground."

"My idea," pursued the Big Business Man, "is for us to get large just as quickly and continuously as possible. Probably you're right about Targo, but don't let's take any chances.

"I've been thinking," he continued, seeing that they agreed with him. "You know this is a curious problem we have facing us. I've been thinking about it a lot. It seemed a frightful long trip down here, but in spite of that, I can't get it out of my mind that we're only a very little distance under the surface of the ring."

"It's absolutely all in the view-point," the Chemist said with a smile. "That's what I meant about having an easier method of getting out. The distance depends absolutely on how you view it."

"How far would it be out if we didn't get any larger?" the Very Young Man wanted to know.

"Based on the size of a normal Oroid adult, and using the terrestrial standard of feet and inches as they would seem to us when Oroid size, I should say the distance from Arite to the surface of the ring would be about one hundred and fifty to a hundred and sixty thousand miles."

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed the Very Young Man. "Don't let's do much walking while we're small."

"You have the idea exactly," smiled the Chemist.

"Taking the other view-point," said the Doctor. "Just where do you figure this Oroid universe is located in the ring?"

"It is contained within one of the atoms of gold," the Chemist answered. "And that golden atom, I estimate, is located probably within one one-hundredth of an inch, maybe even one one-thousandth of an inch away from the circular indentation I made in the bottom of the scratch. In actual distance I suppose Arite is possibly one-sixteenth of an inch below the surface of the ring."

"Certainly makes a difference how you look at it," murmured the Very Young Man in awe.

The Chemist went on. "It is obvious then, that although when coming down the distance must be covered to some extent by physical movement—by traveling geographically, so to speak—going back, that is not altogether the case. Most of the distance may be covered by bodily growth; rather than by a movement of the body from place to place."

"We might get lost," objected the Very Young Man. "Suppose we got started in the wrong direction?"

"Coming in, that is a grave danger," answered the Chemist, "because then distances are opening up and a single false step means many miles of error later on. But going out, just the reverse is true; distances are shortening. A mile in the wrong

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direction is corrected in an instant later on. Not coming to a realization of that when I made the trip before, led me to undertake many unnecessary hours of most arduous climbing. There is only one condition imperative; the body growing must have free space for its growth, or it will be crushed to death."

"Have you planned exactly how we are to get out?" asked the Big Business Man.

"Yes, I have," the Chemist answered. "In the size we are now, which you must remember is several thousand times Oroid height, it will be only a short distance to a point where as we grow we can move gradually to the center of the circular pit. That huge incline plane slides down out of it, you remember. Once in the pit, with its walls closing in upon us, we can at the proper moment get out of it about as I did before."

"Then we'll be in the valley of the scratch!" exclaimed the Very Young Man eagerly. "I'll certainly be glad to get back there again."

"Getting out of the valley we'll use the same methods," the Chemist continued. "There we shall have to do some climbing, but not nearly so much as I did."

The Very Young Man was thrilled at the prospect of so speedy a return to his own world. "Let's get going," he suggested quickly. "It sounds a cinch."

THEY started away in a few minutes more, leaving the body of Targo lying where it had fallen across the river. In half an hour of walking they located without difficulty the huge incline down which the Chemist had fallen when first he came into the ring. Following along the bottom of the incline they reached his landing place —a mass of small rocks and pebbles of a different metallic-looking stone than the ground around marking it plainly. These were the rocks and boulders that had been brought down with him in his fall.

"From here," said the Chemist as they came to a halt, "we can go up into the valley by growth alone. It is several hours,

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but we need move very little from this position."

"How about eating?" suggested the Very Young Man.

They sat down at the base of the incline and ate another meal—rather a more lavish one this time, for the rest they had taken, and the prospect of a shorter journey ahead of them than they had anticipated made the Doctor less strict. Then, the meal over, they took the amount of the drug the Chemist specified. He measured it carefully—more than ten of the pills.

"We have a long wait," the Chemist said, when the first sickness from this tremendous dose had left them.

The time passed quickly. They spoke seldom, for the extraordinary rapidity with which the aspect of the landscape was changing, and the remarkable sensations they experienced, absorbed all their attention.

In about two hours after they had taken the drug the curving, luminous line that was the upper edge of the incline came into view, faint and blurred, but still distinct against the blackness of the sky. The incline now was noticeably steeper; each moment they saw its top coming down toward them out of the height above, and its surface smoothing out and becoming more nearly perpendicular.

They were all standing up now. The ground beneath them seemed in rapid motion, coming toward them from all directions, and dwindling away beneath their feet. The incline, too—now in form a vertical concave wall—kept shoving itself forward, and they had to step backward continually to avoid its thrust.

Within another hour a similar concave wall appeared behind them which they could follow with their eyes entirely around the circumference of the great pit in which they now found themselves. The sides of this pit soon became completely perpendicular—smooth and shining.

Another hour and the action of the drug was beginning to slacken. The walls encircling them, although steadily closing in, no longer seemed to move with such rapidity. The pit as they saw it now was perhaps a thousand feet in diameter and twice as deep. Far overhead the blackness of the sky was beginning to be tinged with a faint gray-blue.

At the Chemist's suggestion they walked over near the center of the circular enclosure. Slowly its walls closed in about them. An hour more and its diameter was scarcely fifty feet.

The Chemist called his companions around him.

"There is an obstacle here," he began, "that we can easily overcome; but we must all understand just what we are to do. In perhaps half an hour at the rate we are growing this enclosure will resemble a well twice as deep, approximately, as it is broad. We cannot climb up its sides, therefore we must wait until it is not more than six feet in depth in order to be able to get out. At that time its diameter will be scarcely three feet. There are nine of us here; you can realize there would not be room for us all.

"What we must do is very simple. Since there is not room for us all at once, we must get large from now on only one at a time."

"Quite so," said the Big Business Man in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone.

"All of us but one will stop growing immediately, one will go on and get out of the pit. He will immediately stop his growth so that he can wait for the others and help them out. Each of us will follow the same method of procedure."

The Chemist then went on to arrange the exact quantities of the drugs they were each to take at specified times, so that at the end they would all be nearly the same size again. When he had explained all this to Oteo and Eena in their native language, they were ready to proceed with the plan.

"Who's first?" asked the Very Young Man. "Let me go with Loto."

They selected the Chemist to go first, and all but him took a little of the other drug and checked their growth. The pit at this time was hardly more than fifteen feet across and about thirty feet deep.

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THE Chemist stood in the center of the enclosure, while his friends crowded over against its walls to make room for his growing body. It was nearly half an hour before his head was above its top. He waited only a moment more, then he sprang upward, clambered out of the pit and disappeared beyond the rim. In a few moments they saw his huge head and shoulders hanging out over the side wall; his hand and arm reached down toward them and they heard his great voice roaring.

"Come on—somebody else."

The Very Young Man went next, with Loto. Nothing unusual marked their growth, and without difficulty, helped by the Chemist's hands reaching down to them, they climbed out of the pit.

In an hour more the entire party was in the valley, standing beside the little circular opening out of which they had come.

The Very Young Man found himself beside Aura a little apart from the others, who gathered to discuss their plan for growing out of the valley.

"It isn't much of a trip, is it, Aura?" the Very Young Man said. "Do you realize we're nearly there?"

The girl looked around her curiously. The valley of the scratch appeared to them now hardly more than a quarter of a mile in width. Aura stared upward between its narrow walls to where, several thousand feet above, a narrow strip of gray-blue sky was visible.

"That sky—is that the sky of your world?" she exclaimed. "How pretty it is!"

The Very Young Man laughed.

"No, Aura, that's not our sky. It's only the space in the room above the ring. When we get the size we are going to be finally, our heads will be right up in there. The real sky with its stars will be even then as far above us as your sky at Arite was above you."

Aura breathed a long sigh. "It's too wonderful—really to understand, isn't it?" she said.

The Very Young Man pulled her down on the ground beside him.

"The most wonderful part, Aura, is going to be having you up there." He spoke gently; somehow whenever he thought of this fragile little girl-woman up in his strange, bustling world, he felt himself very big and strong. He wanted to be her protector, and her teacher of all the new and curious things she must learn.

The girl did not reply at once; she simply met his earnest gaze with her frank answering smile of understanding.

The Chemist was calling to them.

"Oh, you Jack. We're about ready to start."

The Very Young Man got to his feet, holding down his hands to help Aura up.

"You're going to make a fine woman, Aura, in this new world. You just wait and see if you don't," he said as they rejoined the others.

The Chemist explained his plans to them. "This valley is several times deeper than its breadth; you can see that. We cannot grow large enough to jump out as we did out of the pit; we would be crushed by the walls before we were suffciently tall to leap out.

"But we're not going to do as I did, and climb all the way up. Instead we will stay here at the bottom until we are as large as we can conveniently get between the valley walls. Then we will stop growing and climb up the side; it will only be a short distance then."

The Very Young Man nodded his comprehension. "Unless by that time the walls are too smooth to climb up," he remarked.

"If we see them getting too smooth, we'll stop and begin climbing," the Chemist agreed. "We're all ready, aren't we?" He began measuring out the estimated quantities of the drug, handing it to each of them.

"Say, I'm terribly sorry," began the Very Young Man, apologetically interrupting this procedure. "But you know if it wasn't for me, we'd all starve to death."

It was several hours since they had eaten last, and all of them were hungry, although the excitement of their strange journey had kept them from realizing it.

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They ate—"the last meal in the ring" as the Big Business Man put it—and in half an hour more were ready to start.

When they had reached a size where it seemed desirable again to stop growing the valley resembled a narrow cañon—hardly more than a deep rift in the ground. They were still standing on its floor; above them, some twenty-five feet, the parallel edges of the rift marked the surface of the ring. The side walls of the cañon, so close together now that they could almost span its breadth with their outstretched arms, were smooth, but there were still many places where they could climb out without much difficulty.

When they had checked their growth, the Chemist led them down the rift a short distance to where it was slightly wider and an irregular break in its side offered an easier means of ascent. They began their climb here, and in ten minutes more were all safely at the top, on the surface of the ring at last.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ADVENTURERS' RETURN

THE Banker, lying huddled in his chair in the club room, awoke with a start. The ring lay at his feet—a shining, golden band gleaming brightly in the light as it lay upon the black silk handkerchief. The Banker shivered a little for the room was cold. Then he realized he had been asleep and looked at his watch. Three o'clock! They had been gone seven hours, and he had not taken the ring back to the Museum as they had told him to. He rose hastily to his feet; then as another thought struck him, he sat down again, staring at the ring.

The honk of an automobile horn in the street outside aroused him from his reverie. He got to his feet and mechanically began straightening up the room, packing up the several suit-cases. Then with obvious awe, and a caution that was almost ludicrous, he fixed the ring in its frame within the valise prepared for it. He lighted the little light in the valise, and, every moment or two, went back to look searchingly down at the ring inside.

When everything was packed the Banker left the room, returning in a moment with two of the club attendants. They carried the suit-cases outside, the Banker himself holding the bag containing the ring.

"A taxi," he ordered when they were at the door. Then he went to the desk, explaining that his friends had left earlier in the evening and that they had finished with the room.

To the taxi driver he gave a number that was not the Museum address, but that of his own bachelor apartment on Park Avenue. It was still raining as he got into the taxi; he held the valise tightly on his lap, looking into it occasionally and gruffly ordering the chauffeur to drive slowly.

In the sumptuous living-room of his apartment he spread the handkerchief on the floor under the center electrolier and laid the ring upon it. Dismissing the astonished and only half awake butler with a growl he sat down in an easy-chair facing the ring, and in a few minutes more was again fast asleep.

In the morning when the maid entered he was still sleeping. Two hours later he rang for her, and gave tersely a variety of orders. These she and the butler obeyed with an air that plainly showed they thought their master had taken leave of his senses.

They brought him his breakfast and a bath-robe and slippers. And the butler carried in a mattress and a pair of blankets, laying them with a sigh on the hardwood floor in a corner of the room.

Then the Banker waved them away. He undressed, put on his bath-robe and slippers and sat down calmly to eat his breakfast. When he had finished he lighted a cigar and sat again in his easy-chair, staring at the ring, engrossed with his thoughts. Three days, he would give them. Three days, to be sure they had made the trip successfully. Then he would take the ring to the Museum. And every Sunday he would visit it; until they came back—if they ever did.

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THE Banker's living-room with its usually perfect appointments was in thorough disorder. His meals were still being served him there by his dismayed servants. The mattress still lay in the corner; on it the rumpled blankets showed where he had been sleeping. For the hundredth time during his long vigil the Banker, still wearing his dressing-gown and slippers and needing a shave badly, put his face down close to the ring. His heart leaped into his throat; his breath came fast; for along the edge of the ring a tiny little line of figures was slowly moving.

He looked closer, careful lest his labored breathing blow them away. He saw they were human forms—little upright figures, an eighth of an inch or less in height—moving slowly along one behind the other. He counted nine of them. Nine! he thought, with a shock of surprise. Why, only three had gone in! Then they had found Rogers and were bringing them and others back with them!

Relief from the strain of many hours surged over the Banker. His eyes filled with tears; he dashed them away, and thought how ridiculous a feeling it was that possessed him. Then suddenly his head felt queer; he was afraid he was going to faint. He rose unsteadily to his feet, and threw himself full-length upon the mattress in the corner of the room. Then his senses faded. He seemed hardly to faint, but rather to drift off into an involuntary but pleasant slumber.

WITH returning consciousness the Banker heard in the room a confusion of many voices. He opened his eyes; the Doctor was sitting on the mattress beside him. The Banker smiled and parted his lips to speak, but the Doctor interrupted him.

"Well, old friend!" he cried heartily. "What happened to you? Here we are back all safely."

The Banker shook his friend's hand with emotion; then after a moment he sat up and looked about him. The room seemed full of people—strange looking figures, in extraordinary costumes, dirty and torn. The Very Young Man crowded forward.

"We got back, sir, didn't we?" he said.

The Banker saw he was holding a young girl by the hand—the most remarkable looking girl, the Banker thought, that he had ever beheld. Her single garment, hanging short of her bare knees, was ragged and dirty; her jet black hair fell in tangled masses over her shoulders nearly to the ground.

"This is Aura," said the Very Young Man. His voice was full of pride; his manner ingenuous as a child's.

Without a trace of embarrassment the girl smiled and with a pretty little bending of her head, held down her hand to the astonished Banker, who sat speechless upon his mattress.

Loto pushed forward. "That's *mamita* over there," he said, pointing. "Her name is Lylda; she's Aura's sister."

The Banker recovered his wits. "Well, and who are you, little man?" he asked with a smile.

"My name is Loto," the little boy answered earnestly. "That's my father." And he pointed across the room to where the Chemist was coming forward to join them.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS EVE in a little village of Northern New York—a white Christmas, clear and cold. In the dark, blue-black of the sky the glittering stars were spread thick; the brilliant moon poured down its silver light over the whiteness of the sloping rooftops, and upon the ghostly white, silently drooping trees. A heaviness hung in the frosty air—a stillness broken only by the tinkling of sleigh-bells or sometimes by the merry laughter of the passersby.

At the outskirts of the village, a little back from the road, a farmhouse lay snuggled up between two huge apple-trees. An old-fashioned, rambling farmhouse with a steeply pitched roof, piled high now, with snow. It was brilliantly lighted this Christmas Eve, its lower windows sending forth

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broad yellow beams of light over the whiteness of the ground outside.

In one of the lower rooms of the house, before a huge, blazing log-fire, a woman and four men sat talking. Across the room, at a table, a little boy was looking at a picture-book by the light of an oil-lamp.

The woman made a striking picture as she sat back at ease before the fire. She was dressed in a simple black evening-dress such as a lady of the city would wear. It covered her shoulders, but left her throat bare. Her features, particularly her eyes, had a slight Oriental cast, which the mass of very black hair coiled on her head accentuated. Yet she did not look like an Oriental, nor indeed like a woman of any race of this earth. Her cheeks were red—the delicate diffused red of perfect health. But underneath the red there lay a curious mixture of other colors, not only on her cheeks but particularly noticeable on her neck and arms. Her skin was smooth as satin; in the mellow firelight it glowed, not yellow, but with the iridescence of a rainbow.

The four men were dressed in the careless negligee of city men in the country. They were talking gayly now among themselves. The woman spoke seldom, staring dreamily into the fire.

A clock in another room struck eight; the woman glanced over to where the child sat, absorbed with the pictures in his book. The page at which he was looking showed a sleigh loaded with toys, with a team of reindeers and a jolly, fat, white-bearded, red-jacketed old man driving the sleigh over the chimney tops.

"Come Loto, little son," the woman said. "You hear, it is the time of sleep for you."

The boy put down his book reluctantly and went over to the fireplace, standing beside his mother with an arm about her neck.

"Oh, *mamita* dear, will he surely come, this Santa Claus? He never knew about me before; will he surely come?"

Lylda kissed him tenderly. "He will come, Loto, every Christmas Eve; to you and to all the other children of this great world, will he always come."

"But you must be asleep when he comes, Loto," one of the men admonished.

"Yes, my father, that I know," the boy answered gravely. "I will go now."

"Come back, Loto, when you have undressed," the Chemist called after him, as he left the room. "Remember you must hang your stocking."

When they were left alone Lylda looked at her companions and smiled.

"His first Christmas," she said. "How wonderful we are going to make it for him."

"I can remember so well," the Big Business Man remarked thoughtfully, "when they first told me there was no Santa Claus. I cried, for I knew Christmas would never be the same to me."

"Loto is nearly twelve years old," the Doctor said. "Just imagine—having his first Christmas."

"We're going to make it a corker," said

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the Banker. "Where's the tree? We got one."

"In the wood-shed," Lylda answered. "He has not seen it; I was so careful."

They were silent a moment. Then, "My room is chock full of toys," the Banker said reflectively. "But this is a rotten town for candy canes—they only had little ones." And they all laughed.

"I have a present for you, Lylda," the Chemist said after a moment.

"Oh, but you must not give it until tomorrow; you yourself have told me that."

The Chemist rose. "I want to give it now," he said, and left the room. In a moment he returned, carrying a magohany pedestal under one arm and a square parcel in the other. He set the pedestal upright on the floor in a corner of the room and began opening the package. It was a mahogany case, cubical in shape. He lifted its cover disclosing a glass-bell set upon a flat, square mahogany slab. Fastened to the center of this was a handsome black plush case, in which lay a gold wedding ring.

Lylda drew in her breath sharply and held it; the three other men stared at the ring in amazement. The Chemist was saying: "And I decided not to destroy it, Lylda, for your sake. There is no air under this glass cover; the ring is lying in a vacuum, so that nothing can come out of it and live. It is quite safe for us to keep it, this way. I thought of this plan, afterward, and decided to keep the ring, for you." He set the glass-bell on the pedestal.

Lylda stood before it, bending down close over the glass.

"You give me back—my world," she breathed; then she straightened up, holding out her arms toward the ring. "My birthplace, my people—they are safe." And then abruptly she sank to her knees and began softly sobbing.

LOTO called from upstairs and they heard him coming down. Lylda went back hastily to the fire; the Chemist pushed a large chair in front of the pedestal, hiding it from sight.

The boy, in his night-clothes, stood on the hearth beside his mother.

"There is the stocking, *mamita*. Where shall I hang it?"

"First the prayer, Loto. Can you remember?"

The child knelt on the hearth, with his head in his mother's lap.

"Now I lay me—" he began softly, halting over the unfamiliar words. Lylda's fingers stroked his brown curly head as it nestled against her knees; the firelight shone golden in his tousled curls.

The Chemist was watching them with moist eyes. "His first Christmas," he murmured, and smiled a little tender smile. "His first Christmas."

The child was finishing.

"And God bless Aura, and Jack and—and—"

"And Grandfather Reoh," his mother prompted softly.

"And Grandfather Reoh, and *mamita*, and—" The boy ended with a rush—"and me, too. Amen. Now where do I hang the stocking, mother?"

In a moment the little stocking dangled from a mantel over the fireplace.

"You are sure he will come?" the child asked anxiously again.

"It is certain, Loto, if you are asleep."

Loto kissed his mother and shook hands solemnly with the men—a grave, dignified little figure.

"Good night, Loto," said the Big Business Man.

"Good night, sir. Good night, my father—good night, *mamita*; I shall be asleep very soon." And with a last look at the stocking he ran out of the room.

"What a Christmas he will have," said the Banker, a little huskily.

A girl stood in the doorway that led into the dining-room adjoining—a curious-looking girl in a gingham apron and cap. Lylda looked up.

"Oh, Eena, please will you say to Oteo we want the tree from the wood-shed—in the dining-room."

The little maid hesitated. Her mistress smiled and added a few words in a foreign

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tongue. The girl disappeared immediately.

"Every window gets a holly wreath," the Doctor said. "They're in a box outside in the wood-shed."

"Look what I've got," said the Big Business Man, and produced from his pocket a little folded object which he opened triumphantly into a long serpent of filigree red paper on a string with little red and green paper bells hanging from it. "Across the doorway," he added, waving his hand.

A moment after there came a stamping of feet on the porch outside, the sound of a scuffle, a peal of laughter, and then the banging of an outer door. A young man and girl burst into the room, kicking the snow from their feet and laughing. The youth carried two pairs of ice-skates slung over his shoulder; as he entered the room he flung them clattering to the floor.

The girl, even at first glance, was extraordinarily pretty. She was small and very slender of build. She wore stout high-laced brown shoes, a heavy woolen skirt falling to her knees and a short, belted coat, with a high collar buttoned tight about her throat. She was covered with snow. Her face and the locks of hair that strayed from under her knitted cap were soaking wet.

"He threw me down!" She appealed to the others.

"I didn't—she fell."

"You did; into the snow you threw me, off the road." She laughed. "But I am learning to skate."

"She fell three times," said her companion accusingly.

"Twice only, it was," the girl corrected.

"Where's Loto?" asked the Very Young Man, pulling off his hat and coat.

"In bed—see his stocking there?"

A childish treble voice was calling from up-stairs. "Good night Aura—good night my friend Jack."

"Good night, old man. See you to-morrow," the Very Young Man called back in answer.

"You mustn't make so much noise," the Doctor said reprovingly. "He'll never get to sleep."

"No, you mustn't," the Big Business Man agreed. "To-morrow's a very, very big day for him."

"Some Christmas," commented the Very Young Man looking around. "Where's the holly and stuff?"

"Oh, we've got it all right, don't you worry," said the Banker.

"And mistletoe," said Lylda, twinkling. "For you, Jack."

Eena again stood in the doorway and said something to her mistress. "The tree is ready," said Lylda.

THE Chemist rose to his feet. "Come on, everybody; let's go trim it."

They crowded gaily into the dining-room, leaving the Very Young Man and Aura sitting alone by the fire. For some time they sat silent, listening to the laughter of the others trimming the tree.

The Very Young Man looked at the girl beside him as she sat staring into the fire. She had taken off her heavy coat, and her figure seemed long and very slim in the clothes she was wearing now. She sat bending forward, with her hands clasped over her knees. The long line of her slender arm and shoulder, and the delicacy of her profile turned toward him, made the Very Young Man realize anew how fragile she was, and how beautiful.

The iridescence of her skin gleamed under the flaming red of her cheeks. Her lips, too, were red, with the smooth, rich red of coral. The Very Young Man thought with a shock of surprise that he had never noticed before that they were red; in the ring there had been no such color.

In the room adjoining his friends were proposing a toast over the Christmas punch bowl. The Chemist's voice floated in through the doorway.

"To the Oroids—happiness to them." Then for an instant there was silence as they drank the toast.

Aura met the Very Young Man's eyes and smiled a little wanly. "Happiness—to them! I wonder. We who are so happy to-night—I wonder, are they?"

The Very Young Man leaned toward

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her. "You are happy, Aura?" he asked.

The girl nodded, still staring wistfully into the fire.

"I want you to be," the Very Young Man added simply, and fell silent.

A blazing log in the fire twisted and rolled to one side; the crackling flames leaped higher, bathing the girl's drooping little figure in their golden light.

The Very Young Man after a time found himself murmuring familiar lines of poetry. His memory leaped back. A boat sailing over a silent summer lake, underneath the stars. The warmth of a girl's soft little body touching his—the thrill in his heart; he felt it now as his lips formed the words:

"The stars would be your pearls upon a string,
The world a ruby for your finger ring,
And you could have the sun and moon to wear,
If I were King."

"You remember, Aura, that night in the boat?"

Again the girl nodded. "I shall learn to read it, some day," she said eagerly. "And all the others that you told me. I want to. They sing—so beautifully."

A sleigh passed along the road outside; the jingle of its bells drifted in to them. The Very Young Man reached over and gently touched the girl's hand; her fingers closed over his with an answering pressure. His heart was beating fast.

"Aura," he said earnestly. "I want to be King, for you, this first Christmas and always. I want to give you all there is in this life, of happiness, that I can give—just for you."

The girl met his gaze with eyes that were melting with tenderness.

"I love you, Aura," he said softly.

"I love you, too, Jack," she whispered, and held her lips up to his.

There is a sequel to this story
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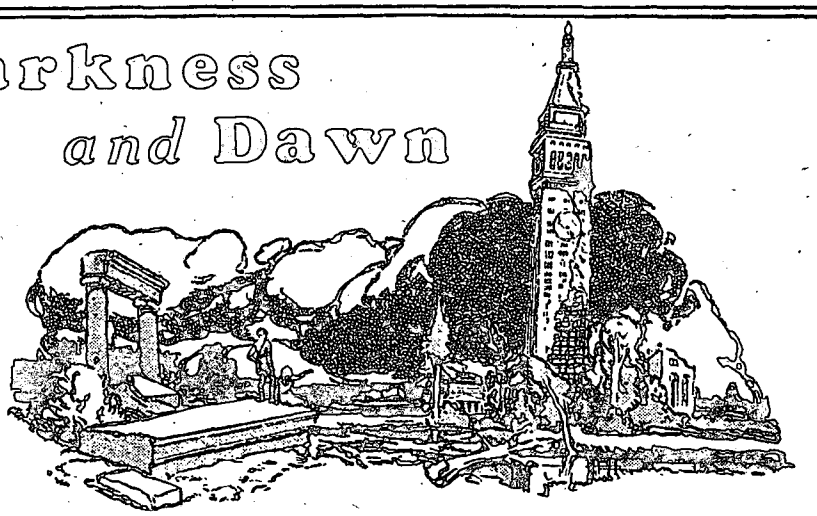

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Through the Dragon Glass

By A. MERRITT

An adventure that was beautiful, even in its horror

HERNDON helped loot the Forbidden City when the Allies turned the suppression of the Boxers into the most gorgeous burglar-party since the days of Tamerlane. Six of his sailormen followed faithfully his buccaneering fancy. A sympathetic Russian highness whom he had entertained in New York saw to it that he got to the seacoast and his yacht. That is why Herndon was able to sail through the Narrows with as much of the Son of Heaven's treasures as the most accomplished laborer in Peking's mission vineyards.

Some of the loot he gave to charming ladies who had dwelt or were still dwelling on the sunny side of his heart. Most of it he used to fit up those two astonishing Chinese rooms in his Fifth Avenue house. And a little of it, following a vague religious impulse, he presented to the Metropolitan Museum. This, somehow, seemed to put the stamp of legitimacy on his part of the pillage—like offerings to the gods and building hospitals and peace palaces and things like that.

But the Dragon Glass, because he had never seen anything quite so wonderful, he set up in his bedroom where he could look at it the first thing in the morning, and he placed shaded lights about it so that he could wake up in the night and look at it! Wonderful? It is more than wonderful, the Dragon Glass! Whoever made it lived when the gods walked about the earth creating something new every day. Only a man who lived in that sort of atmosphere could have wrought it. There was never anything like it. That is so.

I was in Hawaii when the cables told of Herndon's first disappearance. There wasn't much to tell. His man had gone to his room to awaken him one morning —and Herndon wasn't there. All his clothes were, though. Everything was just as if Herndon ought to be somewhere in the house—only he wasn't!

A man worth ten millions can't step out into thin air and vanish without leaving behind him the probability of some commotion, naturally. The newspapers attended to the commotion, but the columns of type boiled down to essentials contained just two facts—that Herndon had come home the night before, and in the morning he was undiscoverable.

I was on the high seas, homeward bound to help the search, when the wireless told the story of his reappearance. They had found him on the floor of his bedroom, shreds of a silken robe on him, and his body mauled as though by a tiger. But there was no more explanation of his return than there had been of his disappearance.

The night before he hadn't been there —and in the morning there he was. Herndon, when he was able to talk, utterly refused to confide even in his doctors. I went straight through to New York, and waited until the men of medicine decided that it was better to let him see me than have him worry any longer about not seeing me.

HERNDON got up from a big invalid chair when I entered. His eyes were clear and bright, and there was no weakness in the way he greeted me, nor in the grip of his hand. A nurse slipped from the room.

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Santhu sang—and I saw myself ages past walking in the City of Rak with her. . . . And there was a face, saturnine as Satan and joyous as Apollo; the face at the topmost peak of the Dragon Glass

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"What was it, Jim?" I cried. "What on earth happened to you?"

"Not so sure it was on earth," he said. He pointed to what looked like a tall easel hooded with a heavy piece of silk covered with embroidered Chinese characters. He hesitated for a moment and then walked over to a closet. He drew out two heavy bore guns, the very ones, I remembered, that he had used in his last elephant hunt.

"You won't think me crazy if I ask you to keep one of these handy while I talk, will you, Ward?" he asked rather apologetically. "This looks pretty real, doesn't it?"

He opened his dressing gown and showed me his chest swathed in bandages. He gripped my shoulder as I took without question one of the guns. He walked to the easel and drew off the hood.

"There it is," said Herndon.

And then, for the first time, I saw the Dragon Glass!

There has never been anything like that thing! Never! At first all you saw was a cool, green, glimmering translucence, like the sea when you're swimming under water on a still summer day and look up through it. Around its edges ran flickers of scarlet and gold, flashes of emerald, shimmers of silver and ivory. At its base a disk of topaz rimmed with red fire shot up dusky little vaporous yellow flames.

Afterward you were aware that the green translucence was an oval slice of polished stone. The flashes and flickers became dragons. There were twelve of them. Their eyes were emeralds, their fangs were ivory, their claws were gold. There were scaled dragons, and each scale was so inlaid that the base, green as the primeval jungle, shaded off into vivid scarlet, and the scarlet into tips of gold. Their wings were of silver and vermilion, and were folded close to their bodies.

But they were alive, those dragons. There was never so much life in metal and wood since Al-Akram, the sculptor of ancient Ad, carved the first crocodile, and the jealous Almighty breathed life into it for a punishment!

And last you saw that the topaz disk that sent up the little yellow flames was the top of a metal sphere around which coiled a thirteenth dragon, thin and red, and biting its scorpion-tipped tail.

It took your breath away, the first glimpse of the Dragon Glass. Yes, and the second and third glimpse, too—and every other time you looked at it.

"Where did you get it?" I asked, a little shakily.

Herndon said evenly: "It was in a small hidden crypt in the Imperial Palace. We broke into the crypt quite by"—he hesitated—"well, call it accident. As soon as I saw it I knew I must have it. What do you think of it?"

"Think!" I cried. "Think! Why, it's the most marvelous thing the hands of man ever made! What is that stone? Jade?"

"I'm not sure," said Herndon. "But come here. Stand just in front of me."

He switched out the lights in the room. He turned another switch, and on the side of the glass opposite me three shaded electrics threw their rays into its mirrorlike oval.

"Watch!" said Herndon. "Tell me what you see!"

I looked into the glass. At first I could see nothing but the rays shining farther, farther, farther—back into infinite distances, it seemed. And then—

"Good God!" I cried, stiffening with horror. "Jim, what hellish thing is this?"

"Steady, old man," came Herndon's voice. There was relief and a curious sort of joy in it. "Steady; tell me just what you see."

I said: "I seem to see through infinite distances—and yet what I see is as close as though it were just on the other side of the glass. I see a cleft that cuts through two masses of darker green. I see a claw, a gigantic, hideous claw that stretches out through the cleft. The claw has seven talons that open and close—open and close. Good God, such a claw, Jim! It is like the claws that reach out from the holes in the lamas' hell to grip the blind souls as they shudder by!"

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"Look, look farther, up through the cleft, above the claw. It widens. What do you see?"

I said: "I see a peak rising enormously high and cutting the sky like a pyramid. There are flashes of flame that dart from behind and outline it. I see a great globe of light like a moon that moves slowly out of the flashes; there is another moving across the breast of the peak; there is a third that swims into the flame at the farthest edge—"

"The seven moons of Rak," whispered Herndon, as though to himself. "The seven moons that bathe in the rose flames of Rak which are the fires of life and that circle Lalil like a diadem. He upon whom the seven moons of Rak have shone is bound to Lalil for this life, and for ten thousand lives."

He reached over and turned the switch again. The lights in the room sprang up.

"Jim," I said, "it can't be real! What is it? Some devilish illusion in the glass?"

He unfastened the bandages.

"The claw you saw had seven talons," he answered quietly. "Well, look at this."

Across the white flesh of his breast, from left shoulder to the lower ribs on the right, ran seven healing furrows. They looked as though they had been made by a gigantic steel comb that had been drawn across him. They gave one the thought that they had been plowed.

"The claw made these," he said as quietly as before.

"Ward," he went on, before I could speak, "I wanted you to see—what you've seen. I didn't know whether you would see it. I don't know whether you'll believe me even now. I don't suppose I would if I were in your place—still—"

He walked over and threw the hood upon the Dragon Glass.

"I'm going to tell you," he said. "I'd like to go through it—uninterrupted. That's why I cover it.

"I DON'T suppose," he began slowly—"I don't suppose, Ward, that you've ever heard of Rak the Wonder-Worker, who lived somewhere back at the beginning of things, nor how the Greatest Wonder Worker banished him somewhere—outside the world?"

"No," I said shortly, still shaken by what I had seen.

"It's a big part of what I've got to tell you," he went on. "Of course you'll think it rot, but—I came across the legend in Tibet first. Then I ran across it again—with the names changed, of course—when I was getting away from China.

"I take it that the gods were still fussing around close to man when Rak was born. The story of his parentage is somewhat scandalous. When he grew older Rak wasn't satisfied with just seeing wonderful things being done. He wanted to do them himself, and he—well, he studied the method. After a while the Greatest Wonder Worker ran across some of the things Rak had made, and found them admirable—a little too admirable. He didn't like to destroy the lesser wonder-worker because, so the gossip ran, he felt a sort of responsibility. So he gave Rak a place somewhere—outside the world—and he gave him power over every one out of so many millions of births to lead or lure or sweep that soul into his domain so that he might build up a people—and over his people Rak was given the high, the low, and the middle justice.

"And outside the world Rak went. He fenced his domain about with clouds. He raised a great mountain, and on its flank he built a city for the men and women who were to be his. He circled the city with wonderful gardens, and he placed in the gardens many things, some good and some very—terrible. He set around the mountain's brow seven moons for a diadem, and he fanned behind the mountain a fire which is of the fire of life, and through which the moons pass to be born again."

Herndon's voice sank to a whisper.

"Through which the moons pass," he said. "And with them the souls of the people of Rak. They pass through the fires and are born again—and again—for

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ten thousand lives. I have seen the moons of Rak and the souls that march with them into the fires. There is no sun in the land —only the new-born moons that shine green on the city and on the gardens."

"Jim! Jim!" I cried impatiently. "What are you talking about? Wake up, man! What's all that nonsense got to do with this?"

I pointed to the hooded Dragon Glass.

"That," he said. "Why, through that lies the road to the gardens of Rak!"

The heavy gun dropped from my hand as I stared at him, and from him to the glass and back again. He smiled and pointed to his bandaged breast.

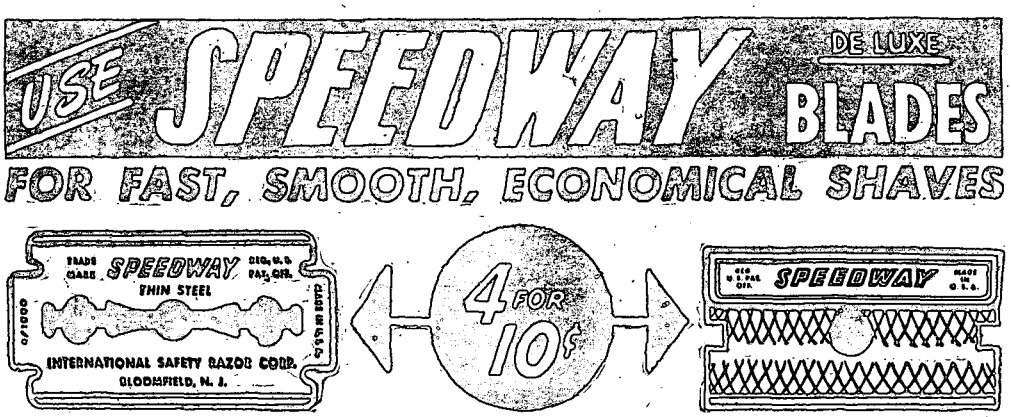
He said: "I went straight through to Peking with the Allies. I had an idea what was coming, and I wanted to be in at the death. I was among the first to enter the Forbidden City. I was as mad for loot as any of them. It was a maddening sight, Ward. Soldiers with their arms full of precious stuff even Morgan couldn't buy; soldiers with wonderful necklaces around their hairy throats and their pockets stuffed with jewels; soldiers with their shirts bulging treasures the Sons of Heaven had been hoarding for centuries! We were Goths sacking imperial Rome. Alexander's hosts pillaging that ancient gemmed courtezan of cities, royal Tyre! Thieves in the great ancient scale, a scale so great that it raised even thievery up to something heroic.

"We reached the throne-room. There was a little passage leading off to the left, and my men and I took it. We came into a small octagonal room. There was nothing in it except a very extraordinary squatting figure of jade. It squatted on the floor, its back turned toward us. One of my men stooped to pick it up. He slipped. The figure flew from his hand and went smash into a wall. A slab swung outward. By a—well, call it a fluke, we had struck the secret of the little octagonal room!

"I shoved a light through the aperture. It showed a crypt shaped like a cylinder. The circle of the floor was about ten feet in diameter. The walls were covered with paintings, Chinese characters, queer-looking animals, and things I can't well describe. Around the room, about seven feet up, ran a picture. It showed a sort of island floating off into space. The clouds lapped its edges like frozen seas full of rainbows. There was a big pyramid of a mountain raising out of the side of it. Around its peak were seven moons, and over the peak—a face!

"I couldn't place that face, Ward, and I couldn't take my eyes off it. It wasn't Chinese, and it wasn't of any other race I'd ever seen. It was as old as the world and as young as tomorrow. It was benevolent and malicious, cruel and kindly, merciful and merciless, saturnine as Satan and as joyous as Apollo. The eyes were as yellow as buttercups, or as the sunstone on the crest of the Feathered Serpent they worship down in the Hidden Temple of Tuloom. And they were as wise as Fate.

" 'There's something else here, sir,' said



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Martin—you remember Martin, my first officer. He pointed to a shrouded thing on the side. I entered, and took from the thing a covering that fitted over it like a hood. It was the Dragon Glass!

"The moment I saw it I knew I had to have it—and I knew I would have it. I felt that I didn't want to get the thing away any more than the thing itself wanted to get away. From the first I thought of the Dragon Glass as something alive. Just as much alive as you and I are. Well, I did get it away. I got it down to the yacht, and then the first odd thing happened.

"You remember Wu-Sing, my boat steward? You know the kind of English Wu-Sing talks. Atrocious! I had the Dragon Glass in my stateroom. I'd forgotten to lock the door. I heard a whistle of sharply indrawn breath. I turned, and there was Wu-Sing. Now, you know that Wu-Sing isn't what you'd call intelligent-looking. Yet as he stood there something seemed to pass over his face, and very subtly change it. The stupidity was wiped out as though a sponge had been passed over it. He did not raise his eyes, but he said, in perfect English, mind you: 'Has the master augustly counted the cost of his possession?'

"I simply gaped at him.

"'Perhaps,' he continued, 'the master has never heard of the illustrious Hao-Tzan? Well, he shall hear!'

"Ward, I couldn't move or speak. But I know now it wasn't sheer astonishment that held me. I listened while Wu-Sing went on to tell in polished phrases the same story that I had heard in Tibet, only there they called him Rak instead of Hao-Tzan. But it was the same story.

"'And,' he ended, 'before he journeyed afar, the illustrious Hao-Tzan caused a last marvel to be wrought. He called it the Gateway.' Wu-Sing waved his hand to the Dragon Glass. 'The master has it. But what shall he who has a Gateway do but pass through it? Is it not better to leave the Gateway behind—unless he dare go through it?'

"HE WAS silent. I was silent, too. All I could do was wonder where the fellow had so suddenly got his command of English. And then Wu-Sing straightened. For a moment his eyes looked into mine. They were as yellow as buttercups, Ward, and wise, wise! My mind rushed back to the little room behind the panel. Ward—the eyes of Wu-Sing were the eyes of the face that brooded over the peak of the seven moons!

"And all in a moment, the face of Wu-Sing dropped back into its old familiar stupid lines. The eyes he turned to me were black and clouded. I jumped from my chair.

"'What do you mean, you yellow fraud!' I shouted. 'What do you mean by pretending all the time that you couldn't talk English?'

"He looked at me stupidly, as usual. He whined in his pidgin that he didn't understand; that he hadn't spoken a word to me until then. I couldn't get anything else out of him, although I nearly frightened his wits out. I had to believe him. Besides, I had seen his eyes. Well, I was fair curious by that time, and I was more anxious to get the glass home safely than ever.

"I got it home. I set it up here, and I fixed those lights as you saw them. I had a sort of feeling that the glass was waiting—for something. I couldn't tell just what. But that it was going to be rather important, I knew—"

He suddenly thrust his head into his hands, and rocked to and fro.

"How long, how long," he moaned, "how long, Santhu?"

"Jim!" I cried. "Jim! What's the matter with you?"

He straightened. "In a moment you'll understand," he said.

And then, as quietly as before: "I felt that the glass was waiting. The night I disappeared I couldn't sleep. I turned out the lights in the room; turned them on around the glass and sat before it. I don't know how long I sat, but all at once I jumped to my feet. The dragons seemed to be moving! They were moving! They

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were crawling round and round the glass. They moved faster and faster. The thirteenth dragon spun about the topaz globe. They circled faster and faster until they were nothing but a halo of crimson and gold flashes. As they spun, the glass itself grew misty, mistier, mistier still, until it was nothing but a green haze. I stepped over to touch it. My hand went straight through it as though nothing were there.

"I reached in—up to the elbow, up to the shoulder. I felt my hand grasped by warm little fingers. I stepped through—"

"Stepped through the glass?" I cried.

"Through it," he said; "and then—I felt another little hand touch my face. I saw—Santhu!

"Her eyes were as blue as the corn flowers, as blue as the big sapphire that shines in the forehead of Vishnu, in his temple at Benares. And they were set wide, wide apart. Her hair was blue-black, and fell in two long braids between her little breasts. A golden dragon crowned her, and through its paws slipped the braids. Another golden dragon girded her. She laughed into my eyes, and drew my head down until my lips touched hers. She was lithe and slender and yielding as the reeds that grow before the Shrine of Hathor that stands on the edge of the Pool of Djeeba. Who Santhu is, or where she came from—how do I know? But this I know—she is lovelier than any woman who ever lived on earth. And she is a woman!

"Her arms slipped from about my neck and she drew me forward. I looked about me. We stood in a cleft between two great rocks. The rocks were a soft green, like the green of the Dragon Glass. Behind us was a green mistiness. Before us the cleft ran only a little distance. Through it I saw an enormous peak jutting up like a pyramid, high, high into a sky of chrysoprase. A soft rose radiance pulsed at its sides, and swimming slowly over its breast was a huge globe of green fire. The girl pulled me gently toward the opening. We walked on silently, hand in hand. Quickly it came to me—Ward, I was in the place whose pictures had been painted in the room of the Dragon Glass!

"We came out of the cleft and into a garden. The Gardens of Many-Columned Iram, lost in the desert because they were too beautiful, must have been like that place. There were strange, immense trees whose branches were like feathery plumes and whose plumes shone with fires like those that clothe the feet of Indra's dancers. Strange flowers raised themselves along our path, and their hearts glowed like the glowworms that are fastened to the rainbow bridge to Asgard. A wind sighed through the plumed trees, and luminous shadows drifted past their trunks. I heard a girl laugh, and the voice of a man singing.

"We went on. Once there was a low wailing far in the garden, and the girl threw herself before me, her arms outstretched. The wailing ceased, and we went on. The mountain grew plainer. I saw another globe of green fire swing out of the

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rose flashes at the right of the peak. I saw another shining into the glow at the left. There was a curious trail of mist behind it. It was a mist that had tangled in it a multitude of little stars. Everything was bathed in a soft green light—such a light as you would have if you lived within a pale emerald.

"WE TURNED and went along another little trail. The little trail ran up a little hill, and on the hill was a little house. It looked as though it was made of ivory. It was a very old little house. It was more like the Jain pagodas at Brahmaputra than anything else. The walls glowed as though they were full of light. The girl touched the wall, and a panel slid away. We entered, and the panel closed after us.

"The room was filled with a whispering yellow light. I say whispering because that is how one felt about it. It was—gentle and alive. A stairway of ivory ran up to another room above. The girl pressed me toward it. Neither of us had uttered a word. There was a spell of silence upon me. I could not speak. There seemed to be nothing to say. I felt a great rest and a great peace—as though I had come home. I walked up the stairway and into the room above. It was dark except for a bar of green light that came through the long and narrow window. Through it I saw the mountain and its moons. On the floor was an ivory head-rest and some silken cloths. I felt suddenly very sleepy. I dropped to the cloths, and at once was asleep.

"When I awoke the girl with the corn-flower eyes was beside me! She was sleeping. As I watched, her eyes opened. She smiled and drew me to her—

"I do not know why, but a name came to me. 'Santhu!' I cried. She smiled again, and I knew that I had called her name. It seemed to me that I remembered her, too—out of immeasurable ages. I arose and walked to the window. I looked toward the mountain. There were two moons now on its breast. And then I saw the city that lay on the mountain's flank. It was such a city as you see in dreams, or as the tale-tellers of El-Bahara fashion out of the mirage. It was all of ivory and shining greens and flashing blues and crimsons. I could see people walking about its streets. There came the sound of little golden bells chiming.

"I turned toward the girl. She was sitting up, her hands clasped about her knees, watching me. Love came, swift and compelling. She arose—I took her in my arms.

"Many times the moons circled the mountains, and the mist held the little, tangled stars passing with them. I saw no one but Santhu; no thing came near us. The trees fed us with fruits that had in them the very essences of life. Yes, the fruit of the Tree of Life that stood in Eden, must have been like the fruit of those trees. We drank of green water that sparkled with green fires, and tasted like the wine Osiris gives the hungry souls in Amenti to strengthen them. We bathed in pools of carved stone that welled with water yellow as amber. Mostly we wandered in the gardens. There were many wonderful things in the gardens. They were very unearthly. There was no day nor night. Only the green glow of the ever-circling moons. We never talked to each other. I don't know why. Always there seemed nothing to say.

"Then Santhu began to sing to me. Her songs were strange songs. I could not tell what the words were. But they built up pictures in my brain. I saw Rak the Wonder-Worker fashioning his gardens, filling them with things beautiful and things—evil. I saw him raise the peak, and knew that it was Lalil; saw him fashion the seven moons and kindle the fires that are of the fires of life. I saw him build his city, and I saw men and women pass into it from the world through many gateways.

"Santhu sang—and I knew that the marching stars in the mist were the souls of the people of Rak which sought rebirth. She sang, and I saw myself ages past walking in the city of Rak with Santhu beside me. Her song wailed, and I felt myself one of the mist-entangled stars. Her song

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wept, and I felt myself a star that fought against the mist, and, fighting, breaks away—a star that fled out and out through immeasurable green space—

"A man stood before me. He was very tall. His face was both cruel and kind, saturnine as Satan and joyous as Apollo. He raised his eyes to us, and they were yellow as buttercups, and wise, so wise! Ward, it was the face above the peak in the room of the Dragon Glass! The eyes that had looked at me out of Wu-Sing's face! He smiled on us for a moment and then—he was gone!

"I took Santhu by the hand and began to run. Quite suddenly it came to me that I had had enough of the haunted gardens of Rak; that I wanted to get back to my own land. But not without Santhu. I tried to remember the road to the cleft. I felt that there lay the path back. We ran. From far behind came a wailing. Santhu screamed—but I knew the fear in her cry was not for herself. It was for me. None of the creatures of that place could harm her who was herself one of its creatures. The wailing drew closer. I turned.

"Winging down through the green air was a beast, an unthinkable beast, Ward! It was like the winged beast of the Apocalypse that is to bear the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet. It was beautiful even in its horror. It closed its scarlet and golden wings, and its long, gleaming body shot at me like a monstrous spear.

"And then—just as it was about to strike—a mist threw itself between us! It was a rainbow mist, and it was—cast. It was cast as though a hand had held it and had thrown it like a net. I heard the winged beast shriek its disappointment. Santhu's hand gripped mine tighter. We ran through the mist.

"BEFORE us was the cleft between the two green rocks. Time and time again we raced for it, and time and time again that beautiful shining horror struck at me—and each time came the thrown mist to baffle it. It was a game! Once I heard a laugh, and then I knew who was my hunter. The master of the beast and the caster of the mist. It was he of the yellow eyes—and he was playing me—playing me as a child plays with a cat when he tempts it with a piece of meat and snatches the meat away again and again from the hungry jaws!

"The mist cleared away from its last throw, and the mouth of the cleft was just before us.

"Once more the thing swooped, Ward—and this time there was no mist. The player had tired of the game! As it struck, Santhu raised herself before it. The beast swerved—and the claw that had been stretched to rip me from throat to waist struck me a glancing blow. I fell—fell through leagues and leagues of green space.

"When I awoke I was here in this bed, with the doctor men around me and this—" He pointed to his bandaged breast again.

"That night when the nurse was asleep I got up and looked into the Dragon Glass, and I saw—the claw, even as you did. The beast is there. It is waiting for me!"

Herndon was silent for a moment.

"If he tires of the waiting he may send the beast through for me," he said. "I mean the man of the yellow eyes. I've a desire to try one of these guns on it. It's real, you know, the beast is—and these guns have stopped elephants."

"But the man with the yellow eyes, Jim," I whispered—"who is he?"

"He," said Herndon—"why, he's the Wonder-Worker himself!"

"You don't believe such a story as that!" I cried. "Why, it's—it's lunacy! It's some devilish illusion in the glass. It's like the—the crystal globe that makes you hypnotize yourself and think the things your own mind creates are real. Break it, Jim! It's devilish! Break it!"

"Break it!" he said incredulously. "Break it? Not for ten thousand lives that are the toll of Rak! Not real? Aren't these wounds real? Wasn't Santhu real? Break it! Good God, man, you don't know what you say! Why, it's my only road back to her! If that yellow-eyed devil back there

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were only as wise as he looks, he would know he didn't have to keep his beast watching there. I want to go, Ward; I want to go and bring her back with me. I've an idea, somehow, that he hasn't—well, full control of things. I've an idea that the Greatest Wonder-Worker wouldn't put wholly in Rak's hands the souls that wander through the many gateways into his kingdom. There's a way out, Ward; there's a way to escape him. I won away from him once, Ward. I'm sure of it. But then I left Santhu behind. I had to go back for her. That's why I found the little passage that led from the throne-room. And so he turned his beast on me.

"And I'll go through again, Ward. And I'll come back again—with Santhu!"

But he has not returned. It is six months now since he disappeared for the second time. And from his bedroom, as he had done before. By the will that they found—the will that commanded that in event of his disappearing as he had done before and not returning within a week I was to have his house and all that was within it—I came into possession of the Dragon Glass. The dragons had spun again for Herndon, and he had gone through the gateway once more. I found only one of the elephant guns, and I knew that he had had time to take the other with him.

I sit night after night before the glass, waiting for him to come back through it—with Santhu. Sooner or later they will come. That I know.

To Edgar Allan Poe

By Robert Lowndes

IN SHADOWLAND thy spirit's bright desire
Was cast, condemned by fortune to abide;
Thy star-crossed soul and dark satanic pride,
Promethean-chained, did evermore aspire
To cosmic splendor and the Titan's throne.
And all thy wounded sensitivity
Burst forth in strange, ethereal melody
That fell on deafened ears and hearts alone.

Brother of all whose souls ill-angels haunt,
Whose pallid brows are lit with unknown flame,
Hast thou found Aidenn and thy lost Lenore?
Or do thy mad bells and thy raven gaunt
Within thy tortured ears still shriek the same
Cacophony of "never . . . nevermore"?

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The Middle Bedroom

By H. deVERE STACPOOLE

It Held a Gruesome Secret

ARE all living creatures represented in the human race, so that we find shark men—or, at least, men with the instincts of sharks—sloth men, cat men, tiger men, and so on? Le Brun started the idea, I believe, and I take it up as bearing on the case of Sir Michael Carey, of Carey House, near Innis Town, on the west coast of Ireland.

I would ask another question before starting on my story: If a man were to give way to his natural instincts and retire from the world would he develop, or, rather, degenerate, along the line of his main instinct? Who can say? I only know that Sir Michael, the builder of the house that took his name, was known a hundred years ago amongst the illiterate peasantry as "the spider." That, so dubbed on account of his mentality and general make-up, he lived alone in his house like a spider in a gloomy corner. That, according to legend, the devil came and took him one dark night, leaving neither rag nor bone of him and that his ghost was reputed to haunt Carey House and the country round, ever after.

The next of kin, Mr. Massy Pope, tried to live in the house. He left suddenly on account of the "loneliness" of the situation and succeeded in letting the place, with the shooting and fishing rights, to a hard-headed Englishman named Doubleday.

Doubleday didn't believe in ghosts nor care about them. Snipe was his game—and cock. He was a two-bottle man—it was in 1863—and if he had met with a ghost any time after ten o'clock he would scarcely have seen it, or seeing it, would not have cared. But his servants were the trouble. They left one day in a body, being soft-headed folk and unfortified and having a very good reason of their own. Then some years elapsed and the story of the next let, as told to me by Micky Feelan one day, out shooting, was as follows:

"When Mr. Doubleday had gone, sor, the house laid empty, sp'ilin' the country for miles round, not a man would go into the groun's to trap a rabbit nor a woman enter its doors to lift a window, and Mr. Pope squanderin' his money to advertise it. That's the man he was, he wouldn't be bet by it, rowlin' in riches what did it matter to him whether it lay let or empty, not a brass farthin', but he wouldn't be bet by it, it was like a horse that wouldn't rise at a ditch and he'd canther it back and try it again and lather it over the head, squanderin' his money in the advertisin' till all of a sudden he got a rise out of a family be name of Leftwidge.

"Dublin people they were, with a grocer's shop in old Fishamble Street. There was a dozen of them, mostly childer and one red-headed strip of a girl to do the cookin'. Twenty pound a year was the rent, I've heard tell, and they lived mostly be trappin' rabbits, the boys doin' a bit of fishin' and the groceries comin' from the shop where the ould father stuck at work in his shirt sleeves while the rest of the lot was airin' themselves in the counthry.

"Be jabers, they were a crowd, ghosts! Little they cared about ghosts shamblin' about widout shoes or stockin's and the boys wid their sticks and catapults killin' hens be the sly and maltreatin' the country boys like Red Injuns, the shame of the country.

"Norah Driscoll was the name of the red-headed slip and many a time me mother has seen her wid her apron over her head rockin' and cryin' wid the treatment of them boys and the botheration of the rest

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of them, for there was a matter of a dozen or more, rangin' like the pipes of an organ from Micky the eldest son six fut and as thin as a gas pipe, to Pat the youngest not the height of your knee.

"Well, sor, the ghost lay aisy at the sight of the lot of them and didn't let a word out of it for a full month. Then, one day, Norah Driscoll was goin' along the top flure passage when the band begin to play. The bedrooms was mostly on that passage and the house agent had warned them against havin' anythin' to do with the middle most bedroom, for, says he, there's rats there that can't be got rid of and that's the cause of all the trouble in the lettin' of the house, says he. It would be a hundred and twenty a year rent, only for them rats, says he, so they're worth a hundred a year to you if you just keep the door shut and don't bother about the noises they do be makin' at odd times—sometimes it's like as if they was sneezin' and blowin' their noses and sometimes it's like as if they was walkin' about with their brogues on and sometimes it's like as if they was cursin' and swearin'. Don't you mind them, he says, but keep sayin' over and over to yourself they're worth a hundred a year to me. That's what he tould Mrs. Leftwidge.

"Well, sor, Norah was moonin' along the passage, sent to fetch a duster or somethin' when she opened the dure of the middle bedroom be mistake. There was no furniture in it, not as much as a three-legged stool and the blind was down, but a shaft of the sun struck through be the side of the blind and there in the middle of the flure was sittin' a little old man dressed as they was dressed a hundred years ago in an ould brown coat wid brass buttons and all and the face of him under his hat topped the sight of him, for Norah said it wasn't a face, but more like one of those masks the childer make out of a bit of paper with holes in it.

"The screech she let out of her as she banged the dure to, brought the family runnin' from down-stairs, and the boys slammed open the dure to get at the chap but there wasn't a speck of him.

"'It's a rat she saw,' says Mrs. Leftwidge. 'Down-stairs wid the lot of you or I'll give you the linth of me slipper—and open that dure again if you dare.'

"DOWN they went, Norah bawlin' and the old woman pushin' her and nothin' more happened that day till the night. Half a dozen of the little ones slep' in the same room with their mother to save the light and be under control and gettin' on for twelve o'clock the old woman, snorin' wid her mouth wide, was woke from her slape be one of the childer.

"'Mummy,' says he, 'listen to the bagpipes.'

"She lifted herself up on her elbow, but, faith, she could have heard it with her head under the clothes, for the dhrone of the pipes filled the house comin' from the middle bedroom.

"Next minit the whole lither of them was in the passage, the old woman with a gutherin' candle in her hand, and as they stood there keepin' time with their teeth to the tune of the pipes, the noise of it suddenly let off and the handle of the middle bedroom dure began to turn.

"They didn't wait to see what was comin' out; no, your honor, you may bet your life they didn't, they was half of them under their beds the linth of that night and next mornin' they began to pack to go back to Dublin, gettin' their old traps together and strippin' the garden to take back wid them in hampers. Micky was sent runnin' to hire two cars to take them to the station, for the railway in those days had just come to Drumboyne, twelve miles away, and whilst he was gone they tore up the potatoes and cut the cabbages and faith they'd have taken the flurin' away if they'd had manes to shift it.

"Well, there they were strapped and ready to go when Mrs. Leftwidge, sittin' in her bonnet on the boxes and atin' a sandwidge, suddenly stops her chewin' and looks about her like a hen countin' her chickens.

"'Where's Pat?' says she.

"Pat was the youngest, as I've tould you,

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sor, a bit of a chap in petticoats, no size at all and always gettin' astray.

"'I don't know,' says one of the boys, 'but faith, I hear him shoutin' somewhere up-stairs.'

"Up-stairs they all rushed led be the woman and they hadn't no sooner reached the top passage than they seen Pat bein' whisked through the open dure of the middle bedroom, dragged along be somebody's hand.

"And when they reached the dureway, there was Pat bein' dragged up the chimney.

"It was one of them big ould chimneys a man could go up, and the heels of the child was disappearin' when Mrs. Leftwidge lays hold of a fut and pulls, hawlin' murder Irish, till the thing in the chimney let go its holt and Pat comes into the grate, kickin' like a pup in the shtrangles and liftin' the roof off with the hullabaloo of him.

"She tuck him be one fut like a turkey and down she runs with him and into the garden and there when they'd soothed him he gives his story, how he'd been playin' in the passage when a little ould man, the funniest ould man he'd ever seen pokes his head out of the bedroom dure. Pat, poor divil, bein' sated at his play couldn't get his legs under him wid the fright; he could only sit and shout whilst the head of the little ould man pops in and out of the dureway like the head of a tortoise from its shell.

"Then out he comes the whole of him and grabs the child be the hand and whisks him off into the bedroom and goes up the chimney first, haulin' Pat afther him. Goes up like a spider.

"Well, they was sittin' about on the boxes they'd hauled out of the house waitin' for the cars and tryin' to squeeze more of the news out of Pat, when up comes the cars wid Sergeant Rafferty and Constable O'Halloran on wan of them, to see they weren't takin' the house away wid them—they'd got that bad name in the county.

"And when the sergeant heard the story, up he went to the bedroom and down he comes again.

"'Here,' says he to O'Halloran, 'take this lot off to the train and go to the barracks and fetch me two carbines wid buck shot ca'tridges—the same ould Forster used to shoot the boys with, bad luck to him—and look slippy,' says he, 'for I'm a brave man, but I don't want to be no longer here be myself than's needful.'

"Off the cars went wid the family packed like flies on them an' in a matter of couple of hours back comes the constable wid the guns. Up they go to the bedroom.

"'Stick your head up the chimney,' says the sergeant.

"'I'll be—if I do,' says the other.

"'Well, then, shut it,' says the sergeant, 'and keep still.'

"They listened but they didn't hear nothing at all. Then the sergeant begins talkin' in a loud voice, winkin' at the other.

"'There's nothin' there,' says he, 'it was a ghost they saw and it's gettin' oneasy I am meself. Let's get off back to Drumboyne and have a glass and lave the ould house to look afther itself.'

"'I'm wid you,' says the constable and downstairs they tramped, makin' as much noise wid their big boots as a rigiment of soldiers. Then in the hall they sits down and begins takin' off their boots.

"'All the same,' says the constable as he pulled the laces, 'I'd be just as aisy in me mind if I was three miles off trampin' on the road to Drumboyne.'

"'So would I,' says the sergeant, 'and it's there I'd be, only I'm thinkin' of promotion.'

"'I'm thinkin' of ghosts,' says the constable wid the boot-lace in his hand.

"'Go on unlacin' your boots,' says the other, 'and don't be a keyoward, this is no ghost. Ghosts can't pull childer up chimneys.'

"'Faith, you seem to know a lot about them,' says the constable, 'but it's I that am thinkin' it's holy water and Father Mooney ought to be on this job instead of you and me and guns.'

"'And how would you get holy water

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up the chimmey?' axes the sergeant then.

"'Wit a squirt,' replies him, 'and how else?'

"'Squirt yourself out of them boots,' says the sergeant, 'or it's me ram-rod I'll take to you, and now follow me,' he says.

"WID the loaded guns in their hands up they wint makin' no more sound than shadas in a wall, and when they got to the room down they squats one on each side of the chimney.

"They hears nothin' for a while, but the tickin' of the sergeant's watch, and the sounds of their own hearts goin' lub-a-dub. Then comes a cough. It wasn't a right sort of cough, for, let alone that it was comin' down a chimney, it sounded to be the cough of a chap that had died for want of water and lain in a brick kiln afther.

"The constable said next day he'd have been up and off only the sound cut the legs from under him, the sergeant wasn't much better and there they sat sayin' their prayers and listenin' for more.

"They waited near an hour hearin' nothin', and then all at once began a noise, a scratchin' and a scramblin' like a cat comin' down a drain pipe.

"'It's comin' down,' shouts the constable.

"'Begob it's not,' says the sergeant and wid that he shoves the muzzle of his gun up the flue and fires.

"He fires from fright to keep it up, so he said at the inquest, but, be jabers, he brought it down like a cock pheasant, tumblin' and clawin' and when they stretched it out on the flure it was a man right enough. A bit of an ould man as brown as a spider, and there he lay dead as a grouse wid the buck-shot holes in him and not a drop of blood no more than if he'd been made of cardboard.

"'Cover the face of him,' says the constable, for that was the sort of face he had, better than I can tell you, and havin' nothin' to cover it they turned him face down, and made off runnin' to Drumboyne for the residint magistrit.

"Well, sor, when they took that chimney down they found a room off it, all littered with bones and birds' feathers and rats' tails. It wouldn't do to be tellin' you of that room, more than it had no winda to it and had been built on purpose be Sir Michael Carey when he put the house up. He'd took to live in it, for that was the way his heart was, and at long last he took to live nowhere else, and that was how the sergeant brought him down and he must have been a matter of a hundred and tin years of age, they reckoned.

"He had his bagpipes to cheer him and frighten away tinints and he'd be out be nights scavengin' for food—they say they found the bones of childer in the room, but may be that was a lie got be him tryin' to drag Pat Leftwidge up the flue—but faith I wouldn't put it beyond him. For that chap was a spider, sor, they said his face was the face of a spider, and his arms and legs no better.

"He'd begun in the shape of a man, maybe, but the spider in him got the better of him. Look, there's all there's left of the house, sor, thim walls beyond the trees. They set a light to it to get shut of that room and if you knew the truth of it all you wouldn't blame them."

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Ray Cummings

Author of "The Girl in the Golden Atom," "A Brand New World," etc.

From "The Men Who Make The Argosy," Feb. 8, 1930—with a few additional words added by Mr. Cummings for FANTASTIC NOVELS

"HE IS a Verne returned and Wells going forward," remarked "Bob" Davis, dean of American magazine editors. "He is the American H. G. Wells," say other critics.

Cummings has an unusual flair for things scientific as evidenced by the fact that while at Princeton University he accomplished the remarkable feat of absorbing three years of physics in that many months. His five years' association with Thomas A. Edison as the latter's personal assistant also added to Cummings's scientific knowledge. His bizarre early life, living on orange plantations in Porto Rico, striking oil in Wyoming, gold seeking in British Columbia, timber cruising in the North, before he was twenty, also left its imprint.

Leaving Mr. Edison's employ, Cummings began writing scientific fiction for many magazines. His stories gripped the popular imagination and they "clicked." Mr. Cummings's success as a writer has been meteoric, for in a few years he has become one of the world's most popular authors of scientific fiction.

Yet when asked about his own life and experiences Mr. Cummings is shy and evasive. He would much rather talk about Miss Betty Starr Cummings, his four-year-old daughter, whom he terms "the really interesting member of the family."

A few of her exploits include being wrecked and trans-shipped in a heavy sea; adrift with her parents in a disabled open boat when only three weeks old; traveling thousands of miles by automobile, train and steamer; weathering a Florida hurricane and coming safely through an automobile accident. From all of which we can see that Mr. Cummings leads rather an adventurous life himself!

Winter finds him at home in Bermuda, but when the temperature starts to rise he quickly makes tracks for Quebec. As we write this a letter arrives from Bermuda announcing that his next full length fantastic novel will soon be ready for ARGOSY readers.

IN THE office of FANTASTIC NOVELS the other day, Mr. Cummings looked this autobiography over with a smile. "It's all right," he said, "except that Betty is fourteen and has already sold a story of her own, which she wrote when she was thirteen. Fulton Oursler accepted it for Liberty Magazine!"

Asked about how he came to write "The Girl in the Golden Atom" Mr. Cummings said that it was the very first thing that he ever wrote, and that he did it simply because he felt like putting down and developing the idea of entering a world inside a ring. He had no thought of selling it, nor even that it might be a usable story. Two friends, William G. McNulty, an important American etcher, and Spring Byington, motion picture actress (known nowadays as *the mother* in "The Jones Family" on the radio) looked over the story, and liked it. Mr. Cummings, who knew no rules for writing but simply put it down "straight from the heart" read it aloud to Mr. McNulty and to Miss Byington when either of them asked how it was coming along. They were very enthusiastic and urged him to take it to a publisher. Bob Davis snapped it up.

And Ray Cummings has been writing ever since.

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Whence came the infernal seeds which grew into monstrosities dealing weird death—and would they overrun the earth?

Spawn of Infinitude

By EDWARD S. PILSWORTH

"FOR the love of Lucy, look at that star!" cried Dick from the edge of the precipice. "Bradley! Towers! Haggerty! It's growing bigger! Why, it's growing!"

I rolled slowly over on my back, so that I could look upward, while Towers sat up with a sharp cry, his face full of wonder, and the light of the campfire, touching it for a moment, made it glow as though with blood. Haggerty sprang to his feet and stood looming over us, while rustlings came from the Indians. The camp was aroused.

Away up in the zenith a star shone with a weird radiance, and even as we looked the light grew stronger and things around began to cast a shadow. Larger and closer it grew, until it shone in the darkness of the night like a sun, and the snow-capped Andes glistened white against the black sky, while our eyes burned with the glare.

"Good Lord!" shrieked Towers, starting to his feet. "It's a comet, and coming straight for us!"

The earth grew bright in an unholy way, and all nature fell to trembling.

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The mules and burros snorted, running wildly about the little platform; the natives gazed in awe, or fell groveling to the earth. Meantime, the fearsome thing grew with a wild speed, then a vision of the infernal regions seemed to shoot before my eyes.

A whirl of wind sucked me nearly to the chasm's edge; another rush swept me backward; tossed me up, and flirted with me as if I were a feather. Then came a crash like the rending of the universe; my senses floated from me and I seemed to die.

I do not know how long the coma lasted, though I think I must have lain for a time in a kind of half trance, wondering why I should have slept in the open. Then the memory of the comet flashed upon me, and with a cry I sprang, trembling, to my feet.

To one side lay a dead donkey, and strewn round were great masses of rock, huge boulders, and an infinity of broken stones and gravel. Here and there lay trees, some of them on their sides, and one or two with their leaves on the ground and the roots sticking stark into the air.

Many were broken, severed, like twigs snapped by a surly boy. Of the tents I could see nothing, and then of a sudden I felt that the air was full of acrid gases. I heaved with nausea, and my whole body throbbed with a furious nervousness.

For a time I think I went crazy, and rambled round the plateau waving my arms and shouting at the top of my voice. There is even a faint memory of my sitting on a rock and hurling stones at the dead donkey; but the next distinct act that I recall is digging furiously at a heap of rubbish and dragging Dick from beneath it.

The work of awakening him brought my senses back to me, and soon the two of us were hunting round for the rest of the party. Haggerty was the next dug up; and then, one after the other, the rest of the white men.

While most of us were more or less bruised, the only one badly hurt was Martin, who died the same afternoon.

The Indians were not so lucky; two were killed outright, and a number gravely wounded. A panic-stricken lot they were, and as soon as their dead were buried the living forsook us.

Pedro, the guide, a tough old sinner, laughed and stayed on.

"*Quien sabe?*" he replied to Dick. "When my time is come I go. Meantime, Señor Ricardo, I stay."

"You old fatalist!" returned Dick, well pleased to see him show so stout a spirit. Then to me: "I wonder what it all means?"

I shook my head, and we started to get the camp in order. The place was in such shape—tents overthrown, food spilled, and animals strayed—that a week or so slipped by before we had a minute to ourselves.

THE next day we went hunting, for meat was getting scarce, leaving Towers behind as cook and caretaker of the camp. Pedro led us a merry chase that day, and we were a weary lot as we straggled back, for any exertion in that thin air was most tiring.

I remember that I sighed with relief as I put my foot upon the plateau, and thought with approval of the supper that Towers would have ready for us. The thought was all we got of it, for there was no sign of him at the camp; the fire was out, and the place looked cold and vacant. With much strong language, mostly directed at the absent one, we turned to and got supper for ourselves.

He did not return the next day, or the next, and the mystery of his disappearance shook us greatly.

"Bradley," Dick called to me a day or so later, handing me his field-glasses, "take these and see what you make of the farther end of the valley."

I focused the glasses on the spot he pointed out and gasped with surprise, for, if the meteor had played havoc at our end, it was chaos supreme up there. Piles of rock and shale and all the dirt that a dozen avalanches might have brought were pitched and jumbled together in one vast confusion. The sides of the mountain were deeply seamed at one spot, as though hit by some gigantic hammer; and it came to

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me all at once that the meteor had struck here.

"Look at the way in which the snow is hanging up there," Dick broke in presently. "There is another avalanche due soon, and one that will fill the valley a hundred feet deep."

The snow, as he said, hung in a curious manner.

The edges of it over on the far side of the valley were hanging over as though all support had been taken away, and it was evident that it was only holding together of its own weight and adhesiveness. I could see many spots where there was not a thing below to hold it in place, and, as my friend said, we were due to have another avalanche that would fill the valley with a hundred feet of snow, and ice.

As this thought filtered through me I turned and looked anxiously at the heights above our camp, and it did me a world of good to see that we were protected. I turned again to the valley, and Dick directed my notice to another spot.

"See what you make of that big rock in the center."

A most singular rock it was, nearly as large as a city block, and bored with holes and passages like a piece of pumice. A strange thing—if one might imagine a gigantic piece of close-grained sponge, solid and petrified, there might be something of a likeness.

All around this rock the ground was speckled with red—a dirty, brownish red—the color of dried and hardened blood; and once or twice as I looked there seemed to come a kind of shiver over it, much as the wind might shake a field of grain.

The sight was so strange, after the virulent-looking green we had been used to seeing, that I thought it might be dust, or a patch of earth from the cliffs round, but I could perceive nothing of the sort on any of the hills.

"Well," questioned Dick, as I handed back the glass, "what do you make of it?"

"That snow will surely topple over very soon," I replied.

"And the rock?" I shook my head. "It is the meteor," he said. "It struck the wall on the far side of the valley, at the spot where you see that terrible scar, and bounded back to the place where it now lies. I feel sure that I am right. Let's go down tomorrow so we can get a closer look at it."

"And be caught in the midst of all that snow when it drops?"

"Nonsense, man! The snow may stay in that shape for years. It will take some strong concussion to shake it loose, though when it does get started it will play the devil. Be a sport and come along."

I finally gave in, though that hanging snow seemed mighty unsafe; and in the meantime Dick jollied or bribed Pedro, so that when we were ready for the start the grim old sinner went ahead of us down the hill. At the last moment Haggerty, a careless, rollicking Irishman, joined us.

The climb down was a weary business, and the heat grew terrific. The path was rough and difficult even on the easiest slope, and my gun grew into a heavy burden long before we reached the bottom.

"Thank the Lord, the descent is over—but gee, this heat is fierce!" grumbled Dick, as he sat down on a handy rock and mopped his forehead. The rest of us followed suit, but were hardly down before the lad sprang to his feet again.

"I'm going to see if I can't find some water round here," he said. "There ought to be plenty coming down from the snow off those hills."

Turning, he wandered away among the boulders and crevices.

"That's queer-looking stuff over there," began Haggerty presently, pointing toward the blotches of red below us, "and if it wasn't that I know better I would say it was some kind of vegetation.

"I wonder if it—" he began again after a pause, then stopped as a cry from Dick rose on the air.

"Bradley! Haggerty! Pedro!" he called. "Come here! Get a move on, quick!" We all sprang to our feet and started toward the sound, Pedro well ahead.

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IT WAS a rocky spot we traversed, full of great boulders and smaller stones and loose gravel that slipped from beneath our feet and made the climbing difficult. Presently the sound of falling water reached us, and we turned a corner of the cliff to where a sparkling stream came tumbling over the rocks into a basin. On the edge of this Dick was struggling with another man.

As we turned the corner we saw Pedro bound forward, throw his weight upon the stranger, and, while Dick held him down, bind his hands together with his belt. Something familiar in the figure struck us as we dashed up, and then we saw that it was Towers.

Dick was standing with hands thrust deep into his pockets, looking down with a puzzled face.

"I believe the poor fellow's gone dippy," he said. "He was babbling round here in the fountain when I came up and put my hand on his shoulder, then he jumped me. Now, I guess he's fainted."

"Want of food," broke in Pedro, who was kneeling, and drawing a flask from his pocket. He pried open Towers' teeth and let some spirit fall into his mouth.

"We don't want him to come to with his hands bound," growled Haggerty, stepping forward and untying the belt. "Four of us to a poor, half-starved devil like he is ought to be enough." Then, as a shudder went through Towers and he opened his eyes: "How are you, old fellow? You look as though you'd had a hard time down here."

The other quivered, buried his face in his hands for a moment, lifted his head once more, and grabbed greedily at the food that Haggerty was handing him. And as he ate it we looked him over more closely.

A pitiful object he was, battered and worn, a great gash on his shoulder, thin, wan cheeks, and a wild look in his eye.

His clothes were torn to rags, and the rents in them showed his flesh covered with great red blotches, a maze of scratches, and myriads of little, red, angry-looking swellings about the size of a pea. He finished the food and looked ravenously for more, but Pedro placed his hand on Haggerty's and held it back.

"Not yet, señor," he said. "The man is hunger-mad. Some water in your flask-top, with some spirit in it, then a little more food will be better. We must go slow."

The draft of spirit did Towers good, then we fed him and talked to him, soothing his shattered nerves, for he was all in a tremble with fear, and now and again would start to his feet and whip around as though he feared what was behind.

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" broke out Haggerty. "There's nobody here but us, old man. What's biting you?"

Then we got the first flash of sense out of him, though it did not sound to us much like sense at the time.

"It's the red devils, Bradley," he said in a low voice, grabbing me by the arm. "It's the red devils! I tell you, they're everywhere!"

"Devils, Towers?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Hush, señor," said Pedro; "it is the famine madness. I have seen men like this before. Sleep is what he needs—sleep and rest and a little more food."

I nodded and we spread our blankets on the shelf around the water, and bedded him down so that presently he fell asleep, while we sat and talked about him. His sleep was full of nightmares which red devils, twining ropes, and creeping suckers seemed to fill.

"We can't leave him like this," said Dick presently. "We might just as well camp here for the night. We'll have to take turns and watch all night to see that no harm comes to him, and put off our journey till tomorrow."

The lad spoke sense, and we built a fire, not that we needed it for warmth, for the air was full of a humid heat, but to keep away the beasts, of which the valley was full. I took the first watch, keeping my rifle handy and rousing Pedro when his watch had come, wondering that I heard

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none of the howlings or caterwaulings that used to be so common in the lower levels.

WHEN I woke the next morning Towers was sitting up, drinking something warm from a tin bowl, and the light of reason was back in his eyes again. The others were cooking breakfast, and he nodded at me as I went toward him.

"Guess you fellows just came in time," he said with a weak, nervous laugh. "Another day would have about finished me."

"How the mischief did you get in this mess?" queried Dick when we were all sitting round. "What made you leave the camp and lose yourself, anyhow?"

Towers shuddered, and his eyes wandered over in the direction of the valley, from which, however, we were shut out by the wall of the chasm.

"I wanted to do some exploring," he said at last.

"But what happened to you?" persisted Dick.

Towers looked from one to the other of us with shifty eyes, then stared at the walls round, and played on the edge of the cup with his knife. Lifting his eyes at last, he looked the boy straight in the face.

"It was the red devils," he whispered.

We all stared at him, lost in wonder; Pedro tapped at his own forehead with a finger-tip.

"The red devils?" queried Dick at last.

"Yes," whispered the other—"full of them; they threw ropes over me and bit me and chewed me."

"But what—" started the boy.

"Oh, shut up, you young fool!" growled Haggerty. "Don't you see the man's wandering? Stop your talk and let him eat his food in peace."

"But I just wanted—"

"I don't care what you wanted; he's had a hard time and he looks it. Now, leave him be." Then, as the lad subsided: "Who's going to stay with him while the rest of us go on our tramp?"

We looked at one another, for while we all wished to do what Towers needed done, yet none wanted to be left behind.

"I guess we'll have to toss for it," I said presently.

"No need, señor; no need for anybody to stay with the gentleman. Señor Towers will sleep after this meal—sleep for hours, maybe days. I have been through it. I have starved on the pampas, and I know."

We were all glad to hear the old guide speak as he did; and he was right in this case, as in most others, for presently Towers began to yawn, and a little later moved over to the blankets and lay down.

While the rest of us were getting ready I took some food and water and placed it at his side.

"If we're not back by the time you're hungry again," I said, "help yourself, but we probably sha'n't be gone more than an hour or so."

He nodded; then, as I turned away, he reached up his hand, caught me, and drew my head down toward him.

"Bradley," he whispered, "stay away from the valley. It's full of red devils, old man—fierce, ravening, little, red devils!"

"All right," I said to humor him; and then, as he lay back on the blankets once more, I turned away, joined the others, and we made the best of our road down the chasm toward the valley.

SEEN from this place farther down, the floor of the valley looked different, and, instead of one mass of reddish brown, we could see that it was divided into various patches. We stopped but a few seconds, however, for Pedro went ahead along a path that he had found in a sort of tunnel, where the view of the valley was shut out from us.

It might have been a quarter of a mile that we went, going down all the time, with the sky showing over us now and again where there was no roof. Haggerty and I were discussing the probability of it being the old waterway from the fall, when Pedro suddenly turned into the open, and Dick followed him.

The two were some little distance ahead, and the lad turned toward us and waved his hand.

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"Get a move on!" he cried. "Come here, quick, and take a good look at what we have found!"

I looked—to find we were nearly on a level with the valley floor, and the plain and slope were covered with thousands of forms—bushes I must call them, for want of a better name.

Not that they were bushes, or anything else that I ever saw, for the shape was most curious, and their color was a dull, deep red, something like crocus-powder, only a trifle redder, or, as they had struck me when viewed from above, dried blood. They seemed to be built up on a central stalk, the thickness of a man's thigh, and at six or eight inches from the ground there branched out the leaves, or sepals, or whatever they may be called.

They struck me at the time as like so many ropes, flowing outward to the height of four or five feet, and then folding over on themselves, making a shape something like a huge wineglass, but with proportionately a much shorter stem.

Stretching along the ground from one trunk to another was a long, ropy-looking connection that formed the whole grove into one large mass. We found out later that many little twigs and suckers shot up from these connecting ropes, and we also found to our sorrow the meaning for them.

Inside the bowl formed by the leaves was hidden some sort of a bright, crimson flower; for, though we could not make out its shape, the little dabs of color kept moving up and down, and I remember Haggerty saying that it was a queer motion for a flower to make.

None of us had ever seen or heard of anything of the kind before; neither had Pedro, and, though we had visited the valley at one time or another, we were all of one mind that nothing of the sort had been there at any previous visit. Whatever the shape of the flowers might be, the flash of their vermilion in the sun had a most gruesome look, and for some reason or other I had no wish to go farther.

Dick, however, would listen to nothing, and Haggerty, reckless Irishman, began to sing. It gave me a weird attack of creeps to hear the rollicking strains of "Garryowen" go pealing up that mysterious Andean valley.

"Señors," broke in Pedro suddenly. "I do not understand all this. Where came those things from so quickly? And where are all the animals and snakes?"

I had not thought of that earlier; but where was all that teeming life we had seen here before? Not a sign of it, save some birds flying high in the air. Not a thing in the valley, so far as we could see, but those weird forms of reddish brown.

"Those red flowers have surely sprung up fast," replied Dick, musingly. "But as to the animal life, why, a lot of it must have been killed when that rock and the avalanche dropped, and the rest probably didn't like the looks of things and pulled out for the other end of the valley. Here goes for finding out, anyway," he finished, pulling off his coat. "You're never going to funk it, Bradley?"

Of course I was not, though I would mighty well have liked to; so, when Haggerty made an Irish dash for the plain, with Dick a close second, I followed along. And Pedro brought up the rear, muttering to himself in Spanish and shaking his wise old head in a way I did not like.

We closed up a little as we got on even ground, and Haggerty was but a dozen yards ahead of Dick when he reached the bushes. He made for the space between a couple of the shrubs, directly toward the meteorite, while I turned to the nearest of these new flowers, curious to examine them closer and more in detail.

This part of our adventure I can never look back upon without a shudder, and, despite the time that has since gone by, a poignant thrill of horror.

The cries of the man and the bestial shrieks of the things I can give no notion of, nor would I if I were able; for the sounds, I verily believe, were worse even than the fetid ichor that dribbled from their misbegotten bodies. It all burst so suddenly on us that this of itself added to the terror.

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The little twigs and branches that struck upward from the horizontal ropes were, I believe, but so many alarms to the center fiend, and as Haggerty walked through them the plant I was looking at shot loose into an amazing whirl of long, sinister-looking cords. The wind-cup shape vanished on the second, and a multitude of waving tentacles took its place.

At the end of each was a strange, flexible, and working disk, that I think was a sucker; for we found later that wherever they fastened, our skin would stretch, and, if the hold was left too long, break into a myriad of little, blood-oozing holes.

Guided by some strange means, the waving arms sprang out to where the hapless Irishman was walking, fastening to and wrapping him round. Then from the open space, where the cup had been, and from out the hollow of the stalk, poured a dozen or more of crimson devils.

Shrieking and raving, they shot, with the quick motion of so many lizards, along the ropy tendrils and fastened to his body. What they were, even what they looked like, I cannot say, except that they favored nothing that the sun shines down upon. A foot or two in size, and with a something for a face, all else was lost in the gleaming redness of their bodies.

The three of us—Dick, Pedro, and myself—shrank back, for there was something daunting in the devilish things, and in that one second poor Haggerty died.

From all the plants around, the long, greedy arms had caught him, pulling, tugging, and straining at his screaming body; jerking and rending till he fell to bits; when each of the devilish things pulled home its bloody portion.

All the time the scarlet things were snarling and ravening at his pieces, raging like drunken furies, and tearing them to smaller bits before our eyes.

I THINK the three of us went mad, for I remember dancing round on the earth, cursing and weeping. Most curious of all, I laughed—long, ringing, mechanical laughter. Then Dick dashed forward, raving insanely, and, pulling myself together, I followed.

By some instinct we drew our machetes, and Dick struck at the devilish things before him with maniacal fierceness. Out came the devil-fish's arms, with the scarlet fiends running along them; but he cut most of the ropes to bits, and I severed those that fastened to him.

All the time we chopped at the tentacles, and stabbed at the crimson things, we laughed and screamed at the top of our voices.

The infernal things scratched and bit and raved with fury, howled and snarled and filled the air with hellish sounds. There was no substance to them, a kind of tough leather shell, filled with a dirty yellow jelly and some ravelings of sinew and gristle.

Those we cracked the others fell upon, pulling the scarlet corpses to little bits and devouring them with hideous sounds and gestures.

So we cut and hacked and slashed, chopping away arm after arm and killing the things, till the plant had neither tentacles nor evil ones to send to us. Then Pedro grabbed me sharply from behind.

"Look!" he cried, pointing over the plain, and there the whole weird community was waving its gruesome arms and sending its scarlet fiends to us by the thousands. The sight sobered us, our madness fell away, and we turned and fled.

I remember crawling up the slope and climbing some of the paths; then, as I recognized the place where we four had stood a short while back, I pitched over on the grass and fell asleep.

It looks a foolish thing as I write it; and perhaps it may not have been so much sleep as stupor, but down I dropped.

When my senses came back Dick was lying naked on the ground, and Pedro was dressing his wounds. I stagged over and sat down by his side, and I do not think that there was a patch on his body the size of my hand that was not bitten, or scratched, or punctured in some way. He turned his head as I threw me down, and his face was thin and haggard.

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"What, in Heaven's name, does it mean?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"*Caramba!*" broke in Pedro. "It is very simple. They are devils. My people have a saying, 'You pick not pears from elm-trees.' What did you expect would come on that piece of hell the other night?"

Dick and I shot a glance at each other, and the same thought filled our minds.

"Think that was it?" he asked.

"It seems a silly idea to think they came through space in that rock."

"Silly—it's crazy! But then the whole affair is. Lord"—he shuddered—"an inferno! Poor Haggerty!"

"That is what happened to Towers," I hazarded, "but he had the strength and luck to pull himself loose."

"Don't I know it? The whole rotten brood is seething in my brain. That is where every animal in the valley went." Then, with a sudden shift of thought: "But, man, how has it come so?"

"The torrid heat of the valley must be the reason," I answered.

At that I fell at laughing again, nervous gigglings, till Pedro looked over at me with curiosity, then passed a flask.

The drink brought my manhood back, and I grew ashamed and weary of my weakness. But it was all so new, so weird, and had burst upon us so suddenly that it is no wonder we were nearly crazed. I sat with my face averted from the plain till Dick was attended to, and then we started on the upward climb.

WHEN we reached the camp it was late, for we were weak and moved by easy stages. And there we found Towers standing and waiting for us. He had made an effort to fix his rags, and did not look so much like a scarecrow as the night before; neither did he look so wan and worn. His cheeks were a little fuller, and the wild light had left his eyes. He watched closely as we crawled into view and flung ourselves on the ground, then scanned our faces carefully and turned to me.

"I suppose it isn't any use asking what's become of Haggerty?" he questioned in a husky voice.

I waved my hand.

"I suppose they got him," he went on, and I nodded.

He took a seat on the ground likewise.

"Are they plants or animals, Bradley?" Dick finally asked.

"Heaven knows!" I replied. "But if ever hell spawned a brood, that is it."

"And you think they came on the aerolite?"

"Where else could they come from?"

"I don't know. It may be that some germ was lodged in those rocky pores. Do you think that the heat of the valley nursed them back to life?"

I nodded, and he rose and walked away, his hands clasped behind, as his manner was when thinking. Several times he paced the plateau, then bidding me good night, lay down.

Terrific rolls of thunder woke me next morning, and I thrust my head into a deluge of rain outside. Flash after flash of lightning and peal after peal of thunder came close on each other's heels.

The mountain shook and quivered, and the rain on our tent sounded like a bombardment of musketry. Yet in the midst of it all I fell asleep again, nor woke till the voice of Dick, excitedly calling me, burst in upon my unconsciousness.

The storm was over, and when I got outside the sun was shining on the snowy peaks, as though the world was only peace and quietness.

The rest of them had moved to the edge of the chasm, from which they could view the valley, and I went and stood beside them.

"Look!" cried Dick, pointing below.

The avalanche had come—the concussion of the storm had loosed the snow—and the valley lay buried under seventy or eighty feet of ice and snow.

"Bradley," said Dick, "we are avenged, for if heat spawned them, cold should kill."

"Amen!" replied Towers with a shudder, and, turning on his heel, moved away.

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What Do You Think?

Address comments to The Letter Editor, FANTASTIC NOVELS, 280 Broadway, N. Y.

F. N. Scores

Dear Editor:

Well, Sir, FANTASTIC NOVELS scored a home run with FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES on base and brought in two runs. My heartiest congratulations on the new mag. It's great. Keep up the present status of F. F. M. along with FANTASTIC NOVELS and you have a combination that other publishers of scientifiction will never beat.

This is my first letter to any editor and before getting my copy of FANTASTIC NOVELS I thought I would never write one to you or any other editor. After seeing the novel "The Blind Spot" in one complete installment, I just couldn't resist offering my congratulations.

"The Blind Spot" is one of the greatest yarns ever written and you surely did well in choosing it for your initial fantastic novel. I surely hope it won't be too long till we get a chance to read its sequel.

I hate to offer any criticism to such a great piece of work, but I see that I must. The only fault I see with the new mag. (and a very great one) is the short story in the back of the issue. Now do you really think that "Monsieur De Guise" has a place along side "The Blind Spot"? If I may offer a suggestion, please leave out the shorts in FANTASTIC NOVELS, and if this reaches print in F. F. M. or if a Reader's Viewpoint dept. is started in FANTASTIC NOVELS, I hope that all the fans who feel the same as I, will, in their letters tell you the same.

One more thing, you really aren't going to make us wait for two whole months for our next issue, are you? How about a bi-weekly, or if this is not possible, at least give us a monthly. The same applies to F. F. M. They are the only two I intend to buy from now on and I would like to get them a little more often.

In closing, I will only say, keep up the good work and be sure to give us the sequel to "The Blind Spot" as soon as possible.

Yours for success,

VAUGHAN HEINER

225 Second St.
CALIFORNIA, PA.

Fan Editor Speaks

Have your new mag FANTASTIC NOVELS and I want to tell you I think it's swell. Am eagerly devouring long novel, "The Blind Spot." It's swell, too. The only thing I can find wrong with the mag is the illustrations, there aren't enough of them! Only one besides the ones that were in F.F.M. The ones you have are pips, though.

One kick: I see you're featuring long novels in F.F.M., too. This is a mistake, why not feature the short stories there? I have enjoyed some shorts far better than long ones. For instance Hank Kuttner's delightful little tale "Pegasus," Merritt's "Three Lines of Old French," Kaempffert's "The Diminishing Draft," etc., all masterpieces.

Again congratulations on FANTASTIC NOVELS.

TOM WRIGHT,
Editor—The Comet.

R. F. D. #1, Box 129,
MARTINEZ, CALIF.

Thanks a Million

Just a line from a college student. I have just finished reading the first issue of FANTASTIC NOVELS. Let me say here and now that it is a knockout. This idea of reprinting the great mystery stories is one that I have wanted to see acted upon for some time. I am a freshman at the University of Illinois, and have followed your companion magazine, FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, since its inception. It, too, is a grand magazine.

One other angle that may not have occurred to you. People in general refuse to credit that which is beyond the scope of their five senses. In the past year I have gotten into some pretty hot arguments over this issue. It seems to me that by making this type of story available, that you are bringing a little closer home to the general public, the fact that there are things which science cannot explain, and which of necessity must turn for explanation to that phase of science called the super-natural.

The sooner that a belief in the inexplicable is fostered, the sooner it will be possible to submit to scientific analysis those subjects and happenings which now come under the head of the Occult, Metaphysics, etc. More power to you. I'm with you a hundred per cent. Thanks a million for grand July issue.

JOHN MARSHALL HEAPS
606 East Clark St.,
CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS

No Ordinary Magazine

I have just read the first issue of FANTASTIC NOVELS Magazine containing "The Blind Spot." It is perfect. You may depend on me to buy every issue you publish. This is not an ordinary magazine, but one to treasure and preserve in one's library. I wish to personally thank you for making the great classics of fantasy available to fantasy fans. The two magazines FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES and FANTASTIC NOVELS provide a perfect feast on alternating months for us fans.

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How about "The Face in the Abyss" for a future issue? By all means have a Readers' Viewpoint.

GERARD LERNER.

266 Crandall Ave.,
YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO

"The Blind Spot" Wonderful

FANTASTIC NOVELS is superb! "The Blind Spot" lives up to the fine reputation it has earned. I hope its sequel is as good.

I hope Virgil Finlay does *all* the illustrating in the new mag. His work has a quality few artists in *any* pulp magazine can ever hope to equal.

Thank you again for a perfectly grand magazine. Long may its banner wave!

12 Fowler St.,
DORCHESTER, MASS.

DAVID GLAZER

"Spot of Life" Requested

Congratulations on your new magazine FANTASTIC NOVELS. It had the best start any magazine has ever had, excepting maybe F.F.M. After reading "The Blind Spot" it is easy to see why it has the title of "The Most Famous Fantastic Mystery of Them All." Please hurry its sequel "The Spot of Life."

I wish to add my plea to the many others I know you are receiving, for a monthly publication of both F.F.M. and F.N. as soon as possible. (Perhaps starting with the next issue?)

As for future issues I tentatively suggest the "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" trilogy (I am attracted by the name rather than by any knowledge of the story), also the rest of the "Radio" series, "Beyond the Great Oblivion," "The Afterglow," "Into the Infinite," "After a Million Years," and all stories by Hall and Merritt.

Thanks for many pleasant hours of imaginative reading.

JOE HUDSON

JAX. BEACH, FLA.

F. N. Unique

I just bought my copy of your new magazine, FANTASTIC NOVELS. I certainly want to tell you that there is nothing on the market to compare with it. I knew the cover would be good, but I did not expect anything so unique. This is one magazine I am proud to be seen with.

I hope you will soon feel that your magazine warrants monthly publication.

How about a short article regarding the author each issue?

Thanks for your two really swell mags, and more power to you.

JACK R. BEALE

326 Haight St.,
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

A. Merritt Books Scarce

Enclosed find my check covering my subscription to FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES and FANTASTIC NOVELS., commencing with the July-August 1940 issue of F.F.M.

Your service—I regard it as such—to fantasy readers in amending the policy of your original magazine to include those longer novels "complete in each issue" in FANTASTIC NOVELS cannot be too highly praised. To me it seems a shame that publishers and editors do not more widely consider lovers of the unusual in literature when they plan their book releases. It took me nine years to collect A. Merritt's novels, and my copy of "The Face in the Abyss" is only in magazine form! I often wonder why his books are not reprinted. Seems to me they would sell without trouble.

A word to Arthur S. Bier anent his request for Merritt's books: I wish him luck, but I doubt if he'll ever get them all. Took me a long time! He'll pay ten dollars for "Ship of Isthar," and may never get his hands on "Face in the Abyss" unless you publish it, and I sincerely trust that you will. Merritt himself has only one copy of that book and has tried unsuccessfully for years to get another! Fantasy fans do not part with their treasures very easily, I've discovered.

All this may give you some hint of my high regard for your two magazines. Only wish they came out every month! You are putting before a definite public those longer—and shorter—masterpieces of fantasy that money cannot buy. Once in a while you find one in a second hand book store, but more often—and how!—you wind up in a blind alley—or maybe a Blind Spot! Got a copy of Chambers' "King in Yellow" the other day. Another rare one. Very rare!

And now you've come along with F.N.! Praise be! I can sit home and save shoeleather, time and money, and still get stories I never would have in an age of Sundays in any book store in the country!

I like Merritt, and would appreciate your publishing his "Face in the Abyss" in F.N. as soon as possible, with Finlay illustrations. I want to bind it and put it among his other books in my library. Also would be grateful to read his "Metal Monster" and "Snake Mother," and whatever others you have on hand, or can get hold of. An Editor's Page and Reader's Viewpoint, as in F.F.M. would just about complete the bill!

You are perpetuating *real literature*. Don't ever forget that!

GARDNER F. FOX

91-61 193rd St.
HOLLIS, N. Y.

First Letter to An Editor

To begin with, I want to say I've been reading stories of the same type as "The Blind Spot" for the last 15 or 16 years now, and this is the first time I have ever written a letter to an editor.

I had to write this letter because I just finished "The Blind Spot" in your new magazine, FANTASTIC NOVELS and the magazine and story are both swell. I have been buying FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES since it first started, but was beginning to be disappointed with it from these last few issues. One thing

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was the serials, I didn't care for them being held over so long a period of time. That has been remedied now, with the new magazine. The second thing was the cover. I liked the first covers with no illustrations at all rather than the type that is plastered all over the page. I thought that gave the magazine a cheaper look. The last complaint I have to make was about the last issue. It had untrimmed pages.

Now, Mr. Editor, I want to tell you that I save all of my magazines so that I can bind them. I do it myself, but have no way to trim the pages.

Well, to get back to FANTASTIC NOVELS. It has trimmed pages. Please keep them that way. The cover is swell also. It seems to make so much better an appearance when the illustration is enclosed in a circle or square covering ¼ to ½ of the page rather than just spread all over it with the printing slapped on top of it.

I also like the chapter index. I don't know if all the stories will have this or not, but it makes the story seem more like a book.

One last request—you must go monthly. Six issues a year isn't much and I know I want twelve. I don't think there is any danger of you running out of material, because there are hundreds of stories that have been printed in the last 15 years that are above average.

You said something about a reader's viewpoint department, so here's hoping this is one of the first letters to reach you.

Your first number is all right. Keep the rest of them looking like it and they will all rate A-1!

EDMUND C. MCFAUL.

39 Ferndale Ave.
CINCINNATI, OHIO.

Attention, Ohio!

As one fantasy fan to another, do you think you could possibly arrange to insert in the Readers' Department of F.F.M. and F.N. an announcement to the effect that there is being formed THE OHIO FANTASY ASSOCIATION? And that all Ohioans interested should write me enclosing a three cent stamp for a reply giving full details of this proposed organization?

JOSEPH M. LEWANDOWSKI, JR.
Futurian
17 Riverview Rd.,
BRECKSVILLE, OHIO.

Collector's Dream

It is indeed rare to discover an editor who has the time and the courtesy to reply to her readers when they send in comments or requests. I sincerely hope that you will endeavor to continue to do so. Such a quality, if retained, should make you the foremost and the most popular editor in fantasy.

The first copy of FN proved to be a collector's dream, what with smooth edges, a decent grade of paper, Finlay illustrations throughout, and an attractive, decorous cover. The story selection could not have been bettered, and the ones promised for future issues are unsurpassable. The one fault was the fewness of illustrations, three being too few for a magazine of 144 pages.

And by all means have a readers' viewpoint department. It is the one thing that has made fantasy what it is today. Also, change FN and FFM to monthlies as soon as possible. There are no better fantasy magazines on the market today. As a suggestion for future issues, why not publish the sequels in successive issues so that the story continuity could follow through with no interruptions?

With thanks for your well wishes to the Ohio Fantasy Association, and for your kindness in promising to announce its formation,

JOSEPH M. LEWANDOWSKI, JR.

From Fan Mag Editor

"Cosmic Tales" will come out the 1st of July. It will be 30 pages of interest to readers and collectors. It is available from me at 15¢. Munsey fantasy list starts soon.

And now to comments. The May-June issue was strangely enough an achievement and a disappointment. The rough edges were, to put it mildly, a shock. To offset it was the pleasant news of "Fantastic Novels." I hope "F.F.M." can return to its monthly schedule soon. I realize you've had quite a few requests, but I would appreciate it if you would reprint some Giesy yarns and another of Farley's triology.

I must compliment you upon your reader's column. Not only have you given the old stories, but you've given us the old reader's column. If you ever change it I'll never get over it.

In closing, may I say I'm an ardent rooter, and have bound the first volume as per your suggestions.

RICHARD B. CRAIN.

1734 Willow Ave.,
WEEHAWKEN, N. J.

Keep F. N. As Is

I have just finished No. 1 of your magazine, FANTASTIC NOVELS, and have noted your request for comments. Do I like it? YES! How often would I like to see it? As often as you care to maintain it at its present standards. And, as there is a war on whose results none of us can predict, also as you say there is ample material for future issues the matter of frequency becomes somewhat important, the more we have before Europe's mess of foolishness snarls up things the better.

As for suggestions: You have a relatively sensible cover; leave it that way and so squelch the cover controversies. The same on the artist question—leave it up to your own judgment, there is little chance that the book will degenerate into a comic supplement.

Again the cover—the above doesn't mean that if by changing it, sales, etc., can be increased, not to. It is the story that counts, *not the skin it is in.* As far as I'm concerned, you can put the book in a bright green cover with futuristic lettering in bright purple, spotted

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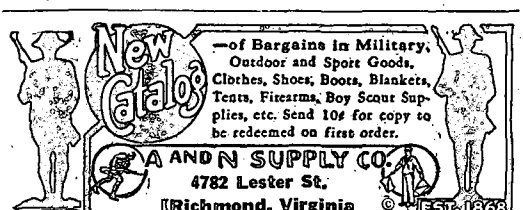
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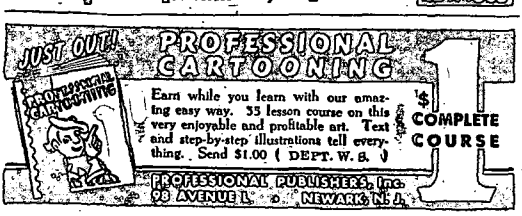
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with red orange, and as long as the stories are there it won't make a particle of difference.

I've been reading this sort of material for the past 15 years, and even so realize that there is plenty of material I have missed. I have heard of many a story that came out before that time, so MORE POWER TO YOU!

JOHN W. BELL.

81 Winter St.,
WHITMAN, MASS.

"The Story Is Great!"

Having but very little spare time, I didn't get around to reading the first issue of your new magazine until yesterday, and finished it today. I cannot refrain from writing you.

First, a word on "The Blind Spot," just to get it out of my system. The story is great! This is no very new discovery, but it delights me just the same. Austin Hall's atmosphere of mystery and wonder, and Homer Eon Flint's bizarre imagination combined into, as you say, a "super-fantastic" that kept me engrossed from beginning to end. My only criticism is that the work is decidedly vague. I hope the sequel, "The Spot of Life," clears up matters, and also hope you'll give us that story very soon. Meantime, the Hall-Flint masterpiece is going to haunt me, I think. Great stuff.

The other story was unimportant.

Finlay's illustrations were good—but why only three? You should have included more pictures and omitted Sheehan's story. Please give us at least five illustrations per novel.

The idea behind FANTASTIC NOVELS is, from most angles, very good. It is pleasant to have the great classic fantastic novels in complete form, and the same for the shorter tales in FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES.

Suggested reprints: "Phantom in the Rainbow" by Slater LaMaster; the great "Moon Maid" trilogy by Edgar Rice Burroughs, which is sadly unavailable in book form; "Maza of the Moon" by Otis A. Kline. And for F. F. M. let me urge you again to reprint A. Merritt's "Through the Dragon Glass."

That's all for now, possibly "Darkness and Dawn" will rouse me to writing again.

PAUL H. SPENCER,
Director, Hartford Science Fiction League.

88 Ardmore Rd.,
WEST HARTFORD, CONN.

F. N. Cover Marvelous

Congratulations! The first issue of FANTASTIC NOVELS surpass all expectations. The cover is marvelous; the interior illustrations superb. And the chance of securing fantasy classics in complete form is the best news in a decade.

A reader's department is certainly less essential to a magazine printing only one or two stories per issue than it is to one containing six or eight stories; this is especially true of a reprint magazine—still, I think brief comments and suggestions might be interesting.

D. B. THOMPSON.

3136 Q St.,
LINCOLN, NEBR.

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